Exploring the Lived Experience of Job Satisfaction and a Workplace Retention among Millennial Clinical Social Workers

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Abstract

The focus of this study is to examine the lived experiences related to job satisfaction and workplace retention among millennial clinical social workers. The issues of job satisfaction and workplace retention have emerged as increasingly significant concerns within the millennial clinical social work cohort. This qualitative action research project utilizes a generic qualitative investigation methodology to address the research inquiry. The research aims to address the subsequent inquiries: How do millennial clinical social workers describe their experience of job satisfaction as mental health providers? What contributing factors lead to workplace retention as a millennial clinical social worker? The objective of this research is to aid social workers in understanding the factors that contribute to job satisfaction and workplace retention among millennial clinical social workers. Participants in the research study articulate their viewpoints regarding the elements that contribute to job satisfaction and workplace retention, specifically within the context of professional, millennial clinical social workers. The data collection method for this study involves conducting semi-structured interviews with millennial clinical social workers, millennial clinical supervisors, and millennial social work administrators. The total number of participants for this study consisted of 15 Licensed Clinical Social Workers (LCSWs). The primary themes identified during the data collection process

highlight a strong desire for improved work-life balance, a need for daily self-care practices, the preference for telehealth and virtual work environments, the integration of technology in practice, the pursuit of pay equity, and the need to ensure that professional identity does not overshadow the personal identity of the millennial clinical social worker. The outcome of this study is a resource guide that recognizes the elements contributing to job satisfaction and retention among millennial social workers.

Dedication

This Capstone project is dedicated to the memory of my late mother, Brenda Lee King-Durham, MSW. Lady Bug, although you were unable to accompany me on this journey to its conclusion, I am confident that you have been by my side, providing unwavering support. I cherish the words exchanged during one of our final conversations and hold them close to my heart. I pledge to continue living and striving towards every goal I set for myself. The completion of this Doctor of Social Work degree is dedicated to the cherished memory of my late paternal grandfather, John Wesley Payne. I extend my heartfelt gratitude to you, PaPa, for inspiring within me the fervent desire to pursue this path and become your Doctor. I would be remiss if I did not express my profound appreciation for my esteemed late grandparents, William King, Thelma Freeman King, and Doris Jean Below Payne. Their sacrifices and inherent desire to persevere in the face of numerous challenges have inspired in me a passion for success and a strong sense of determination that I hold in the highest regard.

Overview of the Project

Project Description

Among millennial clinical social workers, job satisfaction and workplace retention have emerged as pivotal factors influencing career sustainability and organizational effectiveness. leaders are encountering challenges in retaining millennial employees, primarily due to their evolving perspectives on work (Sebastian & Virani, 2021). Social workers represent a crucial segment of mental health professionals globally (Lee et al., 2020), and the population of millennial mental health practitioners is steadily increasing (Mappamiring et al., 2020; Yunita & Saputra, 2019). Currently, the professional workforce is comprised of three generations: baby boomers, Generation Xers, and millennials (Waltz et al., 2020). Baby boomers are individuals who were born between the years of 1946 and 1964 (Waltz et al., 2020). Cultural influence refers to how a society or norms of a community, values, and expectations can have an impact on its members (Rattrie et al., 2019; Vinkers & Schaafsma, 2021). Generation Xers are individuals who were born between the years of 1965 and 1979 (Waltz et al., 2020). Research indicates that baby boomers are increasingly inclined to retire, thereby vacating their positions within the workforce (Waltz et al., 2020). Individuals born between 1980 and 2000 are categorized as millennials (Mappamiring et al., 2020; Yunita & Saputra, 2019). The existing literature highlights that millennial professionals often possess a strong desire for achievement, adeptness at multitasking, and a notable level of confidence (Karthikeyan, 2017).

To enhance employee retention and job satisfaction among social workers in the United States, it is essential to cultivate an understanding of the millennial perspective. Social

workers frequently encounter rigorous and idealistic expectations concerning the effectiveness of their interventions and treatment outcomes (Miller & Grise-Owens, 2021). It is imperative for administrative leaders to promote workplace cultures that embrace the skills and attributes of millennials (Roberts, 2019). Furthermore, the literature suggests that additional research is necessary to deepen our understanding of the factors influencing the preferences of various generations within the workplace (Miller & Grise-Owens, 2021; Stevanin et al., 2018).

Social workers act as catalysts for change, helping to recognize and address gaps and barriers (Howard, 2018). The social work profession is morally obligated to protect and promote the health and well-being of practitioners (National Association of Social Workers, 2021). Additionally, social workers subscribe to the commitment of lifelong learning (NASW, 2021). Exploring the problem from a social work perspective allows for an acknowledgment of factors that affect the work preferences of millennial clinical social workers to be highlighted and recommendations for possible solutions. This study engages three stakeholder groups to collect data about job satisfaction and workplace retention of millennial clinical social workers. The concept of job satisfaction describes the motivation of an employee, productivity, quality of work, and overall life satisfaction (Dziuba et al., 2020; Waltz et al., 2020). The term workplace retention refers to practical strategies in the workplace that maintain a favorable company culture and working environment, thereby encouraging employees to remain in their chosen profession (Cook, 2024; Dong & Yang, 2023). Many facets of society, including language, traditions, rituals, beliefs, values, and standards, are influenced by culture, such as the attributes emulated by millennials (Cigarroa et al., 2018).

This study holds significant importance for the field of social work, as it seeks to

identify the most effective approaches for understanding the factors that contribute to job satisfaction and retention among millennial mental health providers, specifically clinical social workers. Clinical social workers belonging to the millennial generation acknowledge the significance of utilizing web-based time-management tools, alongside the necessity for enhanced self-care routines, continuous education, and career progression (Miller & Grise-Owens, 2021). Research suggests that restructuring the workplace, alleviating work-related pressures, and formulating and implementing organizational policies that enhance quality of life and provide emotional support to employees are essential factors contributing to job satisfaction (Soares et al., 2023). Investigations have shown that understanding strategies aimed at promoting self-care could lead to increased workplace retention among millennial clinical social workers (Lombardero-Posada et al., 2022; Miller & Grise-Owens, 2021). Cultural competence is frequently understood as a self-defined concept synonymous with flexibility (Seriwatana & Charoensukmongkol, 2020). In order to deliver effective care, clinical social workers must possess the ability to identify and confront their own biases, foster an open-minded disposition, and remain aware of the unique needs and characteristics inherent to diverse cultures (Lee et al., 2023; NASW, 2021). Professionals who possess a deeper understanding of cultural impacts, such as millennials, are more likely to adapt swiftly and engage with individuals from various cultural backgrounds with greater proficiency (Seriwatana & Charoensukmongkol, 2020).

Problem Statement and Purpose

The primary objective of this study is to investigate the factors that influence job satisfaction and retention among millennial clinical social workers. Organizational leaders are facing considerable challenges in retaining millennial employees, attributed to their evolving

work methodologies (Sebastian & Virani, 2021). An increasing number of millennials are entering the field as mental health providers (Mappamiring et al., 2020; Yunita & Saputra, 2019). Mental health professionals operating within agency settings often encounter high-stress environments and demanding workloads, which contribute to elevated turnover rates (Geisler et al., 2019). Social workers, recognized as some of the most prominent mental health practitioners globally, are particularly affected (Lee et al., 2020). The provision of therapeutic services to clients can impose detrimental health and psychological effects on these providers (Miller & Grise-Owens, 2021). Millennials are often esteemed for their notable academic and professional achievements (Easton & Steyn, 2022). It has been suggested in scholarly literature that this generation seeks continuous personal and professional development, reflecting a core tenet of the social work profession (Atieq, 2019; NASW, 2021). Despite the importance of this issue, research exploring the determinants of job satisfaction and workplace retention specifically among millennial clinical social workers remains limited, with existing findings yielding inconclusive results (Easton & Steyn, 2022; Tang & Li, 2021).

A notable deficiency can be identified in the existing literature regarding the factors that influence job satisfaction and workplace retention among millennial clinical social workers (Cook, 2024; Dong & Yang, 2023; Dziuba et al., 2020; Waltz et al., 2020). Previous research has acknowledged various elements that impact job satisfaction and workplace retention among millennial professionals across diverse sectors, including business, education, and nursing (He et al., 2019; Roberts, 2019; Waltz et al., 2020). Furthermore, existing literature suggests that additional investigation is necessary to enhance our understanding of the factors that influence generational cohorts in the workplace (Miller & Grise-Owens, 2021; Stevanin et al., 2018).

Employers of millennial social workers may face uncertainty regarding the strategies aimed at improving job satisfaction and workplace retention, particularly in the absence of further research (He et al., 2019; Roberts, 2019; Waltz et al., 2020). The practice of social work is rooted in a commitment to promoting well-being, addressing issues of equality, inclusion, and the interactions between individuals and their environments, which ultimately benefits both clients and practitioners alike (Levin et al., 2020; Powers et al., 2021). Research has demonstrated that factors such as a sense of belonging to the organization, support from colleagues, a positive workplace culture, as well as individual attributes including self-worth, self-efficacy, an internal locus of control, and emotional stability, are all correlated with enhanced work performance outcomes for social workers (Levin et al., 2020).

The field of mental health, and particularly clinical social work, is expected to experience significant growth in the upcoming decade (Polinsky et al., 2022). Employers may find it necessary to create opportunities for promotional and professional development, thereby enabling ambitious millennial professionals to pursue their career goals (Levin et al., 2020). A stable professional career provides individuals with a sense of security, despite the numerous opportunities available for career transitions (Pereira et al., 2024). Such transitions are often characterized by increased autonomy, a greater inclination toward risk-taking, an expanded social network, and enriched experiences (Pereira et al., 2024). Research has shown that mental health providers who are influenced by cultural factors tend to maintain a more balanced work-life dynamic and achieve higher levels of customer satisfaction regarding their services and overall treatment outcomes (Tartakovsky, 2022).

Previous research has indicated that job satisfaction and workplace retention among millennials are prevalent issues affecting a range of professional fields, and scholars are increasingly acknowledging the importance of these concerns (Easton & Steyn, 2022;

Sebastian & Virani, 2021; Waltz et al., 2020). Investigations within the domain of clinical social work have revealed that the cultural competence of social workers correlates with enhanced interpersonal relationships and greater satisfaction among clients with the services and treatment administered (McGregor et al., 2019; Simionata et al., 2019; Tartakovsky, 2022). Historically, research has predominantly concentrated on the incidence of burnout, workplace support, and the overall well-being of social workers who engage in psychotherapy, while insufficient attention has been directed towards job satisfaction and workplace retention (McGregor et al., 2019; Simionata et al., 2019; Tartakovsky, 2022).

Millennial employees are frequently perceived as professionals who are more susceptible to elevated levels of burnout, consequently resulting in shorter employment tenures within organizations. Some attribute this phenomenon to the adaptability exhibited by numerous millennial clinical social workers during the COVID-19 pandemic, a period marked by a substantial increase in the demand for mental health services. Clinical social workers from the millennial generation recognize the importance of job satisfaction alongside the compensation received for the professional services they provide to clients. Professionals possessing a more extensive understanding of cultural influences, particularly millennials, demonstrate a heightened propensity for rapid adaptation and adept interaction with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds (Seriwatana & Charoensukmongkol, 2020).

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics asserts that social workers must cultivate an understanding of various cultures, conduct culturally informed assessments, comprehend the interactions among different cultures, acquire knowledge about them, and develop programs or services that reflect these cultural distinctions (NASW, 2021). The primary objective of social work education is the enhancement of both theoretical and practical competencies in alignment with the values and norms of the prevailing social group

(Tartakovsky, 2022). Several critical factors must be taken into account to ensure job satisfaction among millennial clinical social workers, including professional support, opportunities for professional development, social support, cognitive awareness, and work-life balance (Miller & Reddin Cassar, 2021). Self-care constitutes a fundamental aspect of the well-being of a millennial clinical social work practitioner; however, it is frequently undervalued by many employers (Miller & Reddin Cassar, 2021). Engaging in self-care as a social worker is integral to professional development and is closely linked to the capacity to fully address the needs of clients in order to provide outstanding services (Lewis & King, 2019). It is advisable for social workers to adopt and sustain healthy lifestyle choices, encompassing adequate nutrition, sufficient sleep, and regular exercise (Lewis & King, 2019). Enhanced compensation and recognition, such as being appointed as a team leader or program coordinator, are prevalent strategies employed to retain millennial workers in the workforce (Mappamiring et al., 2020; Waltz et al., 2020). Employers frequently utilize results from employee satisfaction surveys to evaluate workplace retention objectives and overall job satisfaction (Sainju et al., 2021; Shan & Tang, 2023).

Theoretical Framework

The framework guiding this study is systems theory, which posits that our world is shaped by extensive complexities (Klier et al., 2022). This theory places a greater emphasis on the interconnections among various elements while analyzing processes, patterns, and relationships (Klier et al., 2022). Overall, job satisfaction is linked to a variety of factors, including work-related and personality traits, such as the necessity for heightened awareness of cultural influences (Lubbadeh, 2020). Chronic physical pain, emotional fatigue, and feelings of unachieved personal aspirations negatively affect psychological well-being and retention in the workplace among mental health professionals (Soares et al., 2023). Furthermore, training

programs focused on cultural awareness highlight social determinants that can disproportionately affect the outcomes for marginalized communities (McGregor et al., 2019). As the therapeutic field evolves and diversifies, a noticeable gap exists in the profession regarding the training, education, supervision, and support provided to clinicians from varied backgrounds concerning the utilization of their physical presence during clinical practice (Phuongloan, 2021).

This research endeavor seeks to integrate the micro, mezzo, and macro dimensions of social work practice among millennial clinical social workers while acknowledging the factors that influence job satisfaction and workplace retention. On a micro level, the researcher intends to highlight the impact of individual behaviors among millennial clinical social workers on both personal and professional aspects of their lives (Gessler et al., 2021; Waples & Botsford, 2023). On the mezzo level, the investigator aims to underscore organizational behaviors among millennial clinical social workers, emphasizing the importance of goal-setting and accountability (Gessler et al., 2021; Waples & Botsford, 2023). Finally, on the macro level, the investigator plans to stress the significance of employer actions among millennial clinical social workers that recognize the necessity to serve as a catalyst for change and ensure its ongoing sustainability (Gessler et al., 2021; Waples & Botsford, 2023).

Systems theory suggests that individual differences in social behavior vary significantly across different contexts (Chen et al., 2021). To effectively address research questions and accurately characterize multifactorial problems—often referred to as dynamic systems—it is imperative to first develop a comprehensive understanding of the system as a whole before analyzing its individual components (Jiang, 2022). Equally important is the recognition of how such systems evolve and transform through dynamic processes (Jiang, 2022). This necessitates the prioritization of scientific experimentation and the application of contemporary scientific

and technological methodologies (Jiang, 2022). In essence, the expression of diverse personality traits and behaviors is influenced by the specific organizational or social settings in which individuals are situated (Chen et al., 2021).

Within the field of clinical social work, this theoretical framework is applied across multiple levels of practice (Forgey, 2023). At the micro level, the focus is on the individual employee, with particular attention to personal needs that may exist independently of the work environment, such as mental health concerns or familial obligations (Forgey, 2023). At the mezzo level, the emphasis shifts to the employee within the workplace, addressing challenges such as interpersonal conflicts with supervisors or stress related to workload (Forgey, 2023). At the macro level, the organization itself is conceptualized as the client, with interventions aimed at resolving systemic issues through policy development and the implementation of broad-based training initiatives (Forgey, 2023).

Social work professionals possessing a profound understanding of the ways in which culture affects individuals, particularly the characteristics exhibited by millennials, are often able to adapt swiftly and engage more effectively with clients from a variety of cultural backgrounds (Seriwatana & Charoensukmongkol, 2020). Research indicates that mental health providers who are attuned to cultural influences are more likely to achieve a healthier work-life balance and receive higher levels of client satisfaction regarding their services and overall treatment (Tartakovsky, 2022). Moreover, cultural, environmental, social, and historical factors collectively shape individuals' perceptions of the world. Consequently, phenomena that are interpreted in one region of the country may not be perceived similarly in another (Husband, 2020). Research indicates that the distinct life experiences characterizing each generational cohort can substantially influence their perceptions of job satisfaction and their decisions related to continued employment (Nguyen, 2023).

Social workers frequently encounter stressors associated with workplace demands and overall job satisfaction throughout the duration of their professional careers (Apgar & Dolan, 2024). Millennial clinical social workers, in a professional capacity, engage in a career characterized by a diverse array of developments and adaptations, all while navigating organizational changes to effectively address the needs of their clients (Apgar & Dolan, 2024). Social workers who attain the Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW) credential are often regarded as autonomous practitioners, reflecting advanced clinical competence, enhanced earning potential, and a demonstrated adherence to high ethical standards within the profession (Apgar & Dolan, 2024). Established best practices in clinical social work emphasize the critical importance of promoting emotional well-being, addressing occupational stress, and implementing strategies to prevent professional burnout (Hilty et al., 2023). An opportunity presents itself for the social work profession to effectuate transformative changes within systems and structures, thereby addressing injustices and redirecting the profession towards a new trajectory (Powers et al., 2021). This trajectory focuses on alleviating unintentional harm and confronting overt atrocities that seek to undermine individuals in order to preserve the status quo (Powers et al., 2021). Historical perspectives on social work contribute to a deeper understanding of enduring power dynamics, while simultaneously advocating for the remediation of systemic injustices related to poverty, inequality, and oppression (Powers et al., 2021).

Millennial employees demonstrate a strong intrinsic motivation to engage emotionally, cognitively, and physically in their professional roles (Hudiono & Sari, 2022). Research suggests that employers should consider implementing targeted retention strategies to improve job stability among millennial employees and mitigate the high turnover rates currently observed within this demographic (Hudiono & Sari, 2022). The well-being of an individual

professional can significantly influence the collective well-being of the broader organizational workforce (Powers et al., 2021). Engaging with the complex dynamics that shape contemporary thought and developmental trends is essential for the social work profession, as it facilitates the advancement of innovative standards for professional practice (Powers et al., 2021). Constructivism is closely aligned with qualitative research methodologies, as it emphasizes the subjective nature of human experience and the multiplicity of individual worldviews (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019). This paradigm is grounded in the recognition that individuals interpret their environments in unique and complex ways (Peck & Mummery, 2018).

These interpretations often emerge through narrative and dialogic processes, wherein researchers engage with participants' perspectives to co-construct meaning and develop contextually grounded understandings (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019). Within this framework, action research serves as a structured yet flexible approach through which practitioners systematically investigate their own practices to address real-world challenges (Chen, 2022; Galvin et al., 2020). This method is typically employed by individuals with a direct stake in the educational or organizational settings being examined (Ai et al., 2020; Pregmark et al., 2023). Drawing upon insights from interdisciplinary scholarship, qualitative research continues to evolve as a philosophically rich tradition, offering deep and nuanced understandings of individual lives, perspectives, and experiences (Peck & Mummery, 2018). This constructivist worldview aligns with the aims of the current study, which seeks to explore the factors influencing job satisfaction and workplace retention among millennial clinical social workers. By centering participants' subjective experiences, the constructivist approach enables a more authentic articulation of the elements shaping professional fulfillment and commitment in this demographic.

Project Context

This research project aims to examine the factors influencing job satisfaction and workplace retention among millennial clinical social workers. With millennials increasingly entering the mental health workforce globally (Mappamiring et al., 2020; Yunita & Saputra, 2019), employers have expressed growing concern regarding their retention and overall job satisfaction (Sebastian & Virani, 2021). Existing literature highlights that these challenges are not unique to social work but are prevalent across multiple professional disciplines involving millennials (He et al., 2019; Roberts, 2019; Waltz et al., 2020). While prior studies have predominantly centered on burnout, organizational support, and employee well-being among social workers providing psychotherapy (McGregor et al., 2019; Simionata et al., 2019; Tartakovsky, 2022), limited research has specifically addressed job satisfaction and retention within this demographic. This study includes participants who self-identify as millennial clinical social workers and will explore how culturally-informed strategies, those that account for socialization processes and the internalization of professional norms, can enhance understanding of job satisfaction and retention (Cooper et al., 2018).

Millennials now represent a significant portion of the workforce and often seek employment with organizations that align with their values and contribute meaningfully to global and community well-being (Ngotngamwong, 2020). Among this demographic, minority millennial social worker, particularly Black men and women, frequently encounter challenges related to job satisfaction, retention, and workplace dynamics shaped by sociocultural and developmental experiences (Jones et al., 2022). Clinical supervisors play a critical role in supporting social workers by enhancing their clinical competencies, guiding them through complex client interactions, and ensuring the delivery of high-quality care (King et al., 2020; Snowdon et al., 2020). Additionally, social work administrators provide oversight not only in clinical and technical domains but also in areas crucial to workforce sustainability, including

job satisfaction, retention, ethical care delivery, safety, privacy, and organizational accountability (Green et al., 2020; Monaghesh & Hajizadeh, 2020).

The evolving employment preferences and expectations of millennials have posed significant challenges for organizational leaders attempting to retain this generation of employees (Sebastian & Virani, 2021). High turnover rates among agency-based mental health providers are often attributed to the demanding nature of these workplace environments (Geisler et al., 2019). Mental health professionals, including social workers, frequently face adverse physical and psychological effects as a result of the emotionally intensive nature of their work and the critical responsibility they bear in supporting client well-being (Miller & Reddin Cassar, 2021). Millennials are increasingly entering the mental health field, contributing to a growing presence in clinical practice (Mappamiring et al., 2020; Yunita & Saputra, 2019). Many social workers are intrinsically motivated by a strong sense of empathy and a deep commitment to the values and impact of their profession (Geisler et al., 2019).

Employers of millennial social workers may face uncertainty when implementing strategies to improve job satisfaction and workplace retention, particularly in the absence of targeted empirical research (He et al., 2019; Roberts, 2019; Waltz et al., 2020). The profession of social work emphasizes a commitment to individual and collective well-being by addressing issues of equity, inclusion, and the complex interplay between individuals and their environment, benefiting both clients and practitioners (Levin et al., 2020; Powers et al., 2021). Research has identified several key factors associated with enhanced professional functioning among social workers, including a strong sense of organizational belonging, peer support, positive workplace culture, self-worth, self-efficacy, emotional stability, and an internal locus of control (Levin et al., 2020).

The mental health sector, particularly the field of clinical social work, is projected to experience significant growth in the coming decade (Polinsky et al., 2022). In response, employers may need to create structured opportunities for professional advancement and leadership development, which are essential for retaining ambitious millennial professionals seeking to fulfill long-term career goals (Levin et al., 2020). While a stable career path can provide a sense of security, millennials are also increasingly drawn to transitions that offer greater autonomy, risk-taking potential, expanded professional networks, and diversified experiences (Pereira et al., 2024).

As the therapeutic field continues to diversify, there is a gap in the profession that relates to the training, education, oversight, and support that clinicians from different backgrounds receive in the utilization of their bodies during their clinical practice (Phuongloan, 2021). This research endeavor aims to integrate the micro, mezzo, and macro dimensions of social work practice among millennial clinical social workers, while recognizing the elements that influence job satisfaction and workplace retention. At the micro level, this researcher aims to underscore the impact of individual-level behaviors among millennial clinical social workers on both personal and professional aspects of individuals' lives (Gessler et al., 2021; Waples & Botsford, 2023). At the mezzo level, this investigator aims to emphasize organizational-level behaviors among millennial clinical social workers, underscoring the significance of goal-setting and accountability (Gessler et al., 2021; Waples & Botsford, 2023). At the macro level, this investigator intends to highlight the importance of employer-level actions among millennial clinical social workers that acknowledge the need to act as a driving force for change and ensure its ongoing maintenance (Gessler et al., 2021; Waples & Botsford, 2023).

The contemporary workforce is composed of multiple generational cohorts, including Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Millennials. Existing literature highlights that millennial

professionals are often characterized by a strong drive for achievement, a capacity for multitasking, and a high level of self-confidence (Karthikeyan, 2017). In the context of social work practice in the United States, it is essential for organizations to deepen their understanding of the millennial perspective in order to promote job satisfaction and improve employee retention. Social workers frequently contend with demanding and often idealistic expectations regarding the outcomes of their interventions, which can contribute to stress and burnout (Miller & Grise-Owens, 2021). To address these challenges, administrative leaders are encouraged to cultivate organizational cultures that recognize and harness the unique skills and values brought by millennial professionals (Roberts, 2019). Moreover, the literature underscores the need for continued research to better understand generational differences in workplace preferences and expectations, particularly as they pertain to engagement and retention strategies (Miller & Grise-Owens, 2021; Stevanin et al., 2018).

Historical Background and Current Trends

Historically, the demographic composition of the Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW) workforce includes three distinct generational cohorts: Baby Boomers, Generation Xers, and Millennials. Empirical data indicates a substantial increase in the number of millennial clinical social workers in the forthcoming decades, as members of the other generational cohorts are likely to retire or seek alternative professional opportunities. The exact number of millennial clinical social workers currently practicing in the United States remains unclear due to limitations in available demographic data (Apgar & Dolan, 2024). Furthermore, membership in professional organizations such as the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) is not contingent upon an individual's licensure status or their legal authority to practice as a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW) within a specific state or jurisdiction (Apgar & Dolan, 2024). Increasingly, social workers, particularly those from the millennial

generation, are opting to pursue independent practice rather than employment within traditional settings such as state, government, or nonprofit agencies, marking a shift from the career trajectories of previous generations (Apgar & Dolan, 2024). It is essential for social work professionals to recognize the unique challenges associated with contemporary practice, including factors that may contribute to mental and emotional fatigue, such as high caseloads, administrative burden, and limited organizational support (Apgar & Dolan, 2024). Research plays a critical role in exploring complex challenges and generating innovative solutions that have the potential to advance and transform professional social work practice (Powers et al., 2021).

Social work practitioners employ relevant theories to effectively address the social issues that afflict their clients in need (Apgar & Dolan, 2024). The practice of a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW) is grounded in foundational professional values and a strong sense of purpose, with a central emphasis on the therapeutic relationship (Raine et al., 2023). Social work practice as an LCSW is informed by the person-in-environment framework, which facilitates a comprehensive understanding, assessment, and intervention in psychosocial issues (Raine et al., 2023). This approach integrates unique clinical perspectives and competencies while simultaneously addressing broader concerns related to equity, human rights, and social justice (Raine et al., 2023). At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, marked by nationwide lockdowns, social distancing protocols, and limitations on in-person mental health services, social work practitioners rapidly adopted digital technologies to ensure the continuity of care for clients (Hilty et al., 2023). Such selfless actions reflect a strong commitment to lifelong learning and professional development, as well as a deep dedication to addressing clients' needs in the context of natural disasters (NASW, 2021).

Clinical supervision in the social work profession serves as a critical phase of transformative professional growth and development, enabling practitioners to acquire advanced strategies for effectively navigating the complex and multifaceted challenges encountered by clients within diverse social contexts diverse social contexts (Vîșcu & Rad, 2024). The constructivist paradigm acknowledges that professional learning is both a personal and collaborative process, shaped by situational, multidimensional, and systemic contexts (Vîșcu & Rad, 2024). Supervision is an ongoing process of learning that incorporates adaptability in response to the needs of individuals seeking guidance within their respective occupations, with the objective of cultivating independent practitioners (Vîșcu & Rad, 2024). Practical clinical supervisors advocate for the utilization of reflection, thereby fostering a process of contemplating a subject as well as the methodology of one's own thought processes regarding that subject (Vîșcu & Rad, 2024). Reflection is frequently regarded as a process through which professionals assess their experiences, identify opportunities for enhancement, and reinforce their professional identities (Vîșcu & Rad, 2024). Supervision serves as a transformative instrument for social work practitioners, underpinned by a solid foundation that seeks to promote both professional development and emotional well-being among practitioners and those they serve (Vîșcu & Rad, 2024).

Social work administrators are seasoned practitioners responsible for the coordination and oversight of social service programs (Alaslawi & Garrett, 2023). Their multifaceted role often includes supervising interdisciplinary teams, managing budgets to ensure effective service delivery, supporting volunteer engagement, and advocating for adequate resources (Alaslawi & Garrett, 2023). These administrators exhibit critical thinking, effective problem-solving, particularly in resource-constrained environments, and strong interpersonal communication skills (Alaslawi & Garrett, 2023). However, they frequently encounter

significant challenges related to employee retention and job satisfaction within their organizations (Alaslawi & Garrett, 2023). Additionally, social work administrators are often held publicly accountable for perceived deficiencies in service provision (Alaslawi & Garrett, 2023). Despite the complexity of their responsibilities, there is limited empirical evidence indicating that current job-related training and mentorship opportunities sufficiently equip administrators to meet the demands of their roles (Alaslawi & Garrett, 2023). While many social work administrators possess the necessary educational background and licensure to assume their roles, the rapidly evolving nature of the social work profession, coupled with the increasingly complex needs of client populations, demands competencies that extend beyond formal qualifications (Alaslawi & Garrett, 2023).

Contemporary literature highlights that millennials constitute a significantly larger segment of the professional workforce than both their predecessor and successor generational cohorts (Samson et al., 2024). This generation consistently evaluates factors contributing to job satisfaction, placing particular emphasis on organizational elements that may impede employee retention and career advancement (Samson et al., 2024). Moreover, millennials are frequently characterized by unique skill sets and competencies that equip them to address complex challenges within dynamic professional environments (Samson et al., 2024). Millennial professionals often exhibit a heightened sense of emotional intelligence, and their receptiveness to feedback and ongoing development serves as a valuable asset in enhancing job satisfaction (Samson et al., 2024). Many within this cohort express a preference for work environments that integrate relevant technologies, foster workplace civility, and support a positive organizational culture, factors that collectively play a critical role in promoting employee retention (Samson et al., 2024). Job satisfaction among millennials is significantly influenced by a range of factors, including the quality of work-life balance, availability of career

advancement opportunities, organizational culture, and the extent to which autonomy and meaningful work are integrated into their professional roles (Samson et al., 2024). Millennial employees are characterized by an intrinsic preference for independence, flexibility, mobility, a broad, albeit general knowledge base, creativity, a drive for success, and unrestricted access to information, all of which are deeply embedded in their professional identities (Samson et al., 2024). Scholarly literature suggests that when workplace environments fail to align with these values, millennials demonstrate a higher propensity to resign or seek opportunities in organizations that better reflect their personal and professional expectations (Samson et al., 2024).

The correlation between professional responsibilities and compensation is a critical factor influencing employee performance and retention (Ayu Widiari Ayunityas et al., 2024). Historically, social workers have received lower compensation compared to other professional disciplines, despite the complexity and societal importance of their roles. Earlier generational cohorts often equated professional success with holding prestigious titles rather than receiving equitable financial remuneration. Current literature suggests that employees who perceive their compensation and job security as adequate are more likely to demonstrate higher levels of professional performance and engagement (Ayu Widiari Ayunityas et al., 2024). Role ambiguity remains a persistent challenge within the social work profession, particularly among millennial clinical social workers. Many Licensed Clinical Social Workers (LCSWs) hold multiple positions simultaneously to sustain their standard of living. This cohort often carries higher levels of student loan debt compared to previous generations, in addition to facing rising costs associated with basic living expenses. The significant increase in the cost of goods and services following the COVID-19 pandemic has further intensified financial strain. These circumstances present a critical opportunity for the profession to examine the underlying

factors influencing job satisfaction and workplace retention, which may ultimately contribute to reducing high turnover rates among millennial social workers (Hudiono & Sari, 2022). Many millennials express a strong preference for flexible work schedules and advocate for designated periods of rest beyond traditional weekends (Hudiono & Sari, 2022). However, the ability to accommodate such preferences often depends on the policies and structural constraints of the employing organization, which may not always support these arrangements.

The millennial workforce is projected to grow substantially in the coming years, further shaping the dynamics of organizational culture and employee expectations (Negoro & Wibowo, 2021). Existing literature highlights an increasing emphasis on the importance of empathetic leadership in responding to the unique needs of millennial employees (Negoro & Wibowo, 2021). This cohort places significant value on personal identity alongside their professional roles within an organization (Negoro & Wibowo, 2021). As newer generational cohorts enter the workforce, it is imperative for organizational leaders to assess and understand employees' levels of job satisfaction and turnover intentions to foster long-term engagement and retention (Negoro & Wibowo, 2021). Effectively engaging millennial employees requires organizational leaders to adopt approaches grounded in empathy and emotional intelligence (Negoro & Wibowo, 2021). Such leadership practices are essential for fostering a supportive work environment that enhances both individual well-being and organizational effectiveness (Negoro & Wibowo, 2021). Millennial employees often interpret support, encouragement, and recognition from leadership as indicators of a workplace culture that prioritizes individual value and well-being (Negoro & Wibowo, 2021).

A notable gap remains in the literature concerning the specific factors that influence job satisfaction and workplace retention among millennial clinical social workers (Cook, 2024; Dong & Yang, 2023; Dziuba et al., 2020; Waltz et al., 2020). While existing studies have

identified key contributors to job satisfaction and retention among millennials in other professional domains, there is limited research focused exclusively on the unique experiences and challenges faced by millennial clinical social workers (He et al., 2019; Roberts, 2019; Waltz et al., 2020). Scholars have emphasized the need for further inquiry to advance understanding of how generational differences shape workplace dynamics and employee engagement across various fields (Miller & Grise-Owens, 2021; Stevanin et al., 2018).

Synthesis of the Scholarly Literature

Systems theory offers a comprehensive framework for understanding job satisfaction and workplace retention among millennial clinical social workers. Rooted in the principles of interconnectedness and the influence of environmental contexts, this theoretical approach emphasizes that individuals exist within multiple, interacting systems that collectively shape their development, well-being, and professional experiences (Crawford, 2020). When applied to social work, systems theory facilitates a nuanced examination of how various systemic factors influence practitioners' perceptions of job satisfaction and their decisions to remain in or exit the profession. Several core concepts within systems theory are particularly relevant to clinical social work practice. The microsystem refers to the immediate professional environment, including supervisory relationships, peer interactions, and caseload demands (Crawford, 2020). Empirical research suggests that supportive supervision, collegial relationships, and manageable workloads within this system significantly enhance job satisfaction (Crawford, 2020). The mesosystem captures the interconnections between microsystems, such as the dynamic relationship between work and personal life (Crawford, 2020). Conflicting demands across these domains or a lack of work-life balance can increase the risk of burnout and diminish professional fulfillment (Crawford, 2020). The exosystem comprises broader organizational and institutional factors that, while external to the social

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worker's immediate environment, exert substantial influence (Crawford, 2020). These may include agency policies, administrative practices, funding structures, and access to professional development opportunities (Crawford, 2020). Limited resources and inadequate institutional support can undermine job satisfaction and contribute to staff turnover (Crawford, 2020). The macro system encompasses larger societal and cultural norms, including prevailing ideologies about social welfare and public perceptions of the social work profession (Crawford, 2020). Negative societal attitudes or undervaluation of social work can erode morale and professional identity, thereby impacting retention (Crawford, 2020). The chronosystem introduces the temporal dimension, recognizing that changes over time, such as shifts in organizational leadership, economic downturns, or policy reforms, can significantly affect job stability and satisfaction (Crawford, 2020). A systems-oriented analysis allows for the identification of multilevel interventions that address the complex and interrelated factors influencing millennial clinical social workers' workplace experiences (Crawford, 2020). Through this lens, social work organizations can develop targeted strategies to enhance job satisfaction and promote long-term workforce retention.

The existing literature underscores the necessity for effective management of work-family conflicts and the provision of additional professional support to enhance job satisfaction and retention among social workers (Jia & Chi-mei, 2022). Work-family conflicts are associated with several unfavorable outcomes, including burnout, job dissatisfaction, and heightened intentions to leave the profession (Jia & Chi-mei, 2022). Therefore, fostering a supportive work environment can alleviate these detrimental effects, enhance coping strategies, and improve employment outcomes such as job satisfaction and retention (Jia & Chi-mei, 2022). Role stress, characterized by ambiguity and conflicting job expectations, has been shown to negatively influence these outcomes (Jia & Chi-mei, 2022). Conversely, social

support from supervisors and colleagues can significantly mitigate the impacts of turnover intentions (Jia & Chi-mei, 2022). Opportunities for professional development and lower levels of job-related stress are often linked to optimal employment experiences and a commitment to remaining in one's professional role (Jia & Chi-mei, 2022). Assistance from various sources, including senior executives, project managers, supervisors, and coworkers, is crucial in preventing the attrition of social work professionals and promoting positive job performance (Jia & Chi-mei, 2022). Thus, the literature emphasizes the importance of prioritizing work-life balance initiatives and cultivating supportive work environments to enhance job satisfaction and retention among social workers (Jia & Chi-mei, 2022).

Many human service organizations continue to operate within rigid, hierarchical cultures, often resulting in decision-making processes that fail to reflect the evolving needs of a dynamic and diverse society (Campos-Moreira et al., 2020). The literature emphasizes that clinical social workers play a critical role in shaping organizational policies that are responsive to diverse populations, fostering community engagement and empowerment, and advancing social policies that uphold human rights and promote equity (Teixeira et al., 2021). Payne (2021) highlights that this perspective is particularly relevant in relation to marginalized communities, asserting that individuals from minority groups possess lived experiences of oppression that uniquely inform their understanding of systemic inequities. Similarly, Ratliff et al. (2023) argue that only recently have mainstream social work scholars begun to recognize the significance of "place" in shaping health outcomes and well-being, and how spatial factors intersect with structural marginalization and social disparities.

The establishment of trusting relationships among colleagues is essential for fostering job satisfaction within the field of social work (Lazăr et al., 2025). Research indicates that diminished levels of trust among colleagues correlate with reduced job satisfaction, whereas

enhanced trust is associated with increased satisfaction (Lazăr et al., 2025). Strong collaborative efforts are frequently linked to a sense of fulfillment in professional responsibilities, a reduction in burnout, support during moral distress, heightened resilience, improved well-being, and overall job satisfaction (Lazăr et al., 2025). Furthermore, friendships formed in the workplace contribute significantly to both well-being and job satisfaction (Lazăr et al., 2025). Professional fulfillment is also derived from relationships with colleagues, effective communication, consensus-building, and networking (Lazăr et al., 2025). However, cultivating trust within interdisciplinary teams can prove challenging, particularly when the roles and capabilities of social workers are not well understood, leading to frustration and dissatisfaction (Lazăr et al., 2025). It is vital for social workers, particularly those entering a new professional environment, to develop trusting relationships with both colleagues and supervisors, as this period marks the beginning of their acclimatization to organizational culture (Lazăr et al., 2025). Elevated stress levels may contribute to increased employee turnover or disengagement in social work and client relationships (Lazăr et al., 2025). Therefore, it is imperative to further examine the specific nuances and complexities of how organizational culture directly influences a social worker's decision to remain in or depart from their professional role (Lazăr et al., 2025).

The literature consistently identifies empathy as a core competency within the field of social work, essential for effective and ethical practice (Pazer, 2024). Social workers routinely engage in intensive emotional labor, requiring them to navigate complex interpersonal dynamics while maintaining professional boundaries (Pazer, 2024). Empathy not only supports the development of therapeutic rapport but is also recognized as a key contributor to practitioner well-being, particularly in relation to job satisfaction (Pazer, 2024). Despite this, there remains a need for empirical research exploring the specific relationship between

empathy and job satisfaction within social work settings (Pazer, 2024). Practitioners working in under-resourced and impoverished communities may find that empathy alone is insufficient to achieve professional fulfillment, given the systemic barriers that limit intervention effectiveness (Pazer, 2024). Nevertheless, social workers who perceive themselves as highly empathic may be more likely to evaluate their interventions positively, potentially leading to greater job satisfaction regardless of measurable client outcomes (Pazer, 2024).

The body of literature recognizes that millennials constitute a significant portion of the global professional workforce (Yunita, 2023). Careers that prioritize work-life balance and job satisfaction are known to have a beneficial impact on career development (Yunita, 2023). Empirical evidence indicates that turnover rates among the millennial demographic are higher compared to those of other generational cohorts (Yunita, 2023). Therefore, it is essential to understand the millennial generation in order to enhance career development for scholars, practitioners, and researchers alike (Yunita, 2023). A notable characteristic of millennial employees is their inherent technological proficiency, which shapes their roles within the workplace (Yunita, 2023). In recent years, particularly in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a notable transition from mere career selection to a focus on career development (Yunita, 2023). Effective career management, mentorship, and supervision tend to foster a sense of belonging, which in turn influences continued employment. (Yunita, 2023). Millennial employees often express a strong desire for appropriate mentorship and guidance that support them in reaching their goals and objectives, in return for their commitment and emotional investment in the organization (Yunita, 2023). Research suggests that the decision of millennial employees to remain with an organization, regardless of the field, is influenced by corporate policies and available opportunities (Yunita, 2023).

Before the advent of the digital communication era, the utilization of technology by clinical social workers was relatively minimal (Hilty et al., 2023). The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic significantly expedited the adoption of technology, underscoring the necessity for competencies in technological proficiency to ensure the delivery of ethical and effective telemental health services, a crucial aspect of the millennial demographic (Hilty et al., 2023). Developments such as the extensive use of videoconferencing for therapeutic engagement involve the acquisition of new skills and ongoing monitoring, which are essential for maintaining continuity of care and extending services to underserved populations (Hilty et al., 2023). Although the incorporation of technology has proven to be a valuable asset for millennial clinical social workers, it is essential to assess how the application of technology contributes to overall job satisfaction and retention within the workplace (Hilty et al., 2023).

Cultural differences reveal variations in the overall efficacy of retention strategies concerning the millennial employee demographic (Hassan et al., 2024). A substantial amount of data has been amassed primarily from a Western cultural perspective, neglecting insights from developing countries and emerging workplace trends (Hassan et al., 2024). Scholars have recognized a deficiency in understanding how workplace strategies can be adapted to enhance the retention of millennial employees (Hassan et al., 2024). In certain situations, principles of justice and equity emerge as critical factors for workplace retention, potentially outweighing considerations of compensation (Hassan et al., 2024). Furthermore, generational perspectives receive insufficient focus in discussions surrounding retention strategies specific to the millennial demographic (Hassan et al., 2024). The needs and expectations of millennial employees exhibit considerable variation across different cultures (Hassan et al., 2024). Therefore, comprehending these cultural nuances is vital for the development of retention strategies that effectively resonate with millennials (Hassan et al., 2024). It is essential for

employers to reassess data and global strategies to better address workplace retention challenges (Hassan et al., 2024). By undertaking this evaluation, organizations may enhance job satisfaction and mitigate turnover rates among millennials (Hassan et al., 2024). Additionally, empirical data frequently overshadows discussions of transformational leadership, stress reduction, and compensation and rewards in the context of retention efforts aimed at millennial employees (Hassan et al., 2024).

The issue of pay equity and its relationship to job satisfaction has been a longstanding concern across numerous professional disciplines (Qiao & Lv, 2025). While existing literature acknowledges a link between perceived fairness in compensation and positive workplace outcomes, such as increased work engagement and psychological safety, many studies fall short in examining the underlying psychological and organizational mechanisms that mediate this relationship (Qiao & Lv, 2025). Moreover, research findings on the impact of pay equity remain inconsistent, underscoring the need for further investigation (Qiao & Lv, 2025). Despite these variations, a recurring theme across studies is that perceptions of pay fairness are positively associated with enhanced professional engagement and a greater sense of psychological safety among employees (Qiao & Lv, 2025).

Researchers from a variety of fields have undertaken studies on job satisfaction and workplace dynamics among millennial educators, nurses, and business professionals, furthering the foundational work established by their predecessors (He et al., 2019; Roberts, 2019; Waltz et al., 2020). Scholarly literature recognizes the established relationships between individualized behaviors and job satisfaction within the millennial employee demographic (He et al., 2019). Research indicates that individualized behaviors, supported by organizational policies, contribute to the achievement of financial, social, and community objectives (He et al., 2019). Furthermore, it is acknowledged that effective leaders play a significant role in

shaping employee behavior through mentorship and organizational actions that influence workplace environments (He et al., 2019; Roberts, 2019; Waltz et al., 2020). There is also an inherent awareness noted between older and younger employees, particularly among those within the millennial demographic (Roberts, 2019).

Scholars have observed conflicting perspectives regarding millennial employees, highlighting the unrealistic expectations held by highly esteemed and educated professionals representing this cohort (Roberts, 2019). It has been noted that millennials seek a professional work environment that fosters both personal and professional empowerment (Roberts, 2019). Workplace challenges often arise from a strong desire for success and upward mobility, coupled with a misconception that such achievements can be realized in a short timeframe (Roberts, 2019). Additionally, it is acknowledged that generational factors significantly influence job satisfaction (Waltz et al., 2020). Comprehensive historical accounts of individual generations, including their values and workplace expectations, are available globally (Waltz et al., 2020). As generational predecessors retire, it is crucial to recognize the influence of millennials in order to enhance job satisfaction and promote workplace retention across various professional disciplines (Waltz et al., 2020).

Previous researchers advocated for the application of both qualitative and quantitative methodologies and questionnaires that incorporate linear regression to investigate job satisfaction levels and the inclination to remain in their positions (He et al., 2019). A prominent characteristic of the millennial demographic is their demonstrated efficiency, rapid execution, and substantial output in primary job responsibilities (He et al., 2019). Additionally, a case study approach was employed to examine the educational experiences of millennials, which are intrinsically linked to their professional experiences and chronological age (Roberts, 2019). This case study focused on the perceived benefits and challenges that millennials encounter

within their professional environments (Roberts, 2019). Furthermore, another study utilized focus groups to gather data on millennial professionals (Waltz et al., 2020). These focus groups incorporated semi-structured interview questions to elicit participants' perspectives on various factors affecting their job satisfaction and their desire to persist in their professional roles (Waltz et al., 2020).

One study emphasizes the significance of organizational contexts and individual factors, illustrating their direct correlation with job satisfaction and employee retention among the millennial demographic (He et al., 2019). Another study identifies several key themes, including professional relationships, rewards, communication, professional development, and staffing shortages, all of which impact job satisfaction and retention for millennials (Waltz et al., 2020). Additionally, research highlights that millennials have a preference for acquiring knowledge within their professional environments (Roberts, 2019). This study further reveals millennials' desire for a deeper understanding and a positive work atmosphere that is both professionally rewarding and informative (Roberts, 2019). Research limitations are typically evident in the majority, if not all, instances of data collection (He et al., 2019; Roberts, 2019; Waltz et al., 2020). A prominent theme that emerges underscores the necessity for leadership to acknowledge and adeptly integrate the diverse skill sets contributed by each generational cohort, irrespective of their professional disciplines (Waltz et al., 2020). It is clear that numerous attributes exhibited by millennials will prove advantageous in cultivating a workplace characterized by empathy and respect, thereby enhancing overall job satisfaction and employee retention (Waltz et al., 2020).

Synthesis of the Practitioner Literature

A substantial body of research highlights the critical role of perceived organizational fairness in influencing employee job satisfaction (Wahby et al., 2022). Employees consistently seek recognition and respect from supervisors and organizational leaders, which can be undermined by perceived inequities, particularly in cases of wage disparities among individuals performing comparable roles (Wahby et al., 2022). Ensuring equitable compensation is both a moral imperative and a legal responsibility for employers, regardless of employees' generational backgrounds (Wahby et al., 2022). When employees perceive their compensation as fair, they are more likely to exhibit higher levels of organizational trust, commitment, and loyalty (Wahby et al., 2022). Empirical evidence substantiates the argument that organizational employers ought to establish policies designed to foster trust, enhance job satisfaction, and provide professional support for the empowerment of social workers (Shuhaimi et al., 2025). Moreover, research indicates that social workers who receive strong organizational support are more likely to perceive the acquisition of essential tools and resources as accessible and efficient, thereby facilitating the ongoing development of their professional knowledge, skills, abilities, values, and ethical practice (Shuhaimi et al., 2025). By prioritizing these factors, policymakers and administrators can cultivate workplace environments that support the achievement of core social work objectives and more effectively address the complex needs of the client populations served (Shuhaimi et al., 2025).

Organizations serve as foundational elements within broader social systems, especially amid the complexities of an increasingly dynamic and evolving global landscape (Wahby et al., 2022). Within the modern employment context, there is a growing emphasis on developing workplace environments that not only offer financial remuneration but also foster professional fulfillment and job satisfaction (Wahby et al., 2022). Job autonomy has been identified as a

critical factor in helping employees manage workplace demands and stressors, ultimately contributing to greater job satisfaction (Clausen et al., 2021). However, in some organizational settings, social workers report experiencing limited job autonomy, which has been linked to increased rates of turnover and diminished organizational commitment (Wang et al., 2019). The literature highlights a growing shift within the social work profession toward a business-oriented model of practice, a transformation that has contributed to an increasing number of social workers leaving the field (Liu et al., 2023).

Employees who derive genuine satisfaction from their roles are statistically more inclined to experience reduced levels of professional burnout and fatigue, perceive a sense of reward and support in their positions, and demonstrate confidence and enthusiasm in pursuit of their objectives (Jutengren et al., 2020). The notion of job satisfaction varies significantly among professionals, reflecting distinct characteristics of their generational cohorts (Jutengren et al., 2020). Furthermore, research suggests that the level of workplace engagement plays a critical role in influencing employee retention rates (Jutengren et al., 2020). Social workers frequently demonstrate altruistic behaviors that extend beyond their formal job descriptions, often to the detriment of their own well-being (Pazer, 2025). The scarcity of professional literature concerning interventions designed to enhance the professional well-being and job satisfaction of social work practitioners is notably limited (Pazer, 2025). The field of social work faces a significant challenge as younger generational cohorts, particularly millennials, ascend within social service agencies (Liu et al., 2023). These emerging professionals desire employers to utilize management strategies that promote inclusive and supportive work environments, which ultimately enhance employee retention and job satisfaction (Liu et al., 2023).

Social work practitioners have a long-standing history of developing and implementing strategies to address gaps in care and operational services, a critical skill set that benefits not only client systems but also strengthens the profession (Lombardi et al., 2024). The literature substantiates the concept of professional identity development among practitioners in the field of social work (Pecukonis et al., 2019). An examination of demographic factors, including age or generational cohort, as well as professional expertise, has significant implications for job satisfaction levels and workplace retention rates among social workers (Pazer, 2025). System-level work-related challenges significantly contribute to the excessive demands faced by professional social work practitioners (Chiarelli-Helminiak et al., 2021). The literature highlights the need for further exploration and application of the life course framework within the professional development of social work practitioners (Apgar, 2023). This framework emphasizes the significance of accounting for cultural and ethical standards, societal influences, and individual life circumstances throughout a practitioner's career trajectory (Apgar, 2023).

Literature recognizes that younger generational cohorts compel employers to create professional workplace environments that are empowering, thereby effecting change within both the organization and society at large (Pertiwi & Prena, 2024). Leaders who embody the characteristics of transformative leadership exhibit a natural inclination towards caring, which subsequently enhances employees' perceptions of job satisfaction (Pertiwi & Prena, 2024). Examining the generational culture of the workforce is increasingly important, as millennials are becoming the predominant demographic across numerous professional sectors (Emeralda & Ghazali, 2025). The literature indicates that organizations often experience elevated turnover rates among millennial employees when there is misalignment between organizational goals and key employee expectations, including opportunities for career advancement, work-life

balance, and equitable compensation (Emeralda & Ghazali, 2025). Millennial employees frequently cite workplace challenges such as boredom, limited autonomy, and insufficient access to appropriate tools and technology as key factors contributing to their intentions to leave professional roles (Sutardi & Novitasari, 2024).

Historically, professional social work practice has been associated with challenges such as high caseloads, frequent exposure to adverse client outcomes, limited resources, and constrained opportunities for career advancement, all of which have been linked to reduced job satisfaction and workplace retention (Miller & Grise-Owens, 2021). Millennial practitioners, however, differ significantly from previous generational cohorts, placing greater emphasis on the importance of regular self-care as a means of maintaining personal and professional well-being (Miller & Grise-Owens, 2021). Some studies have even suggested that members of this demographic may, at times, engage in self-care practices to an excessive degree, raising questions about balance and sustainability in professional coping strategies (Miller & Grise-Owens, 2021). Assertions regarding how self-care is perceived and practiced among generational cohorts other than millennials remain relatively limited in the existing literature (Miller & Grise-Owens, 2021). There is a growing call for further research to examine how generational characteristics influence workplace behaviors, particularly in the field of social work (Miller & Grise-Owens, 2021). Incorporating specific demographic variables, such as financial status and length of tenure in the profession, may offer valuable insights into factors influencing job satisfaction and workplace retention among millennial social work practitioners (Miller & Grise-Owens, 2021). Additionally, some literature highlights the perception of entitlement among millennial professionals, suggesting this may influence workplace expectations and experiences. It is important to recognize that each generational cohort encounters unique professional challenges and achievements, often managing them in ways

shaped by their formative experiences and educational influences (Miller & Grise-Owens, 2021).

The complexity of navigating multifaceted client and professional systems presents a significant challenge for social work practitioners globally (Harvey & Jones, 2022). In an ideal workplace setting, social workers benefit from systems that streamline administrative responsibilities for supervisors, reduce practitioner workloads, and enhance efficiency across both client and provider platforms (Liu et al., 2020). However, uniform approaches to agency-based interventions often reflect a "copy-and-paste" model of treatment, which can result in services being perceived as superficial and inflexible, ultimately diminishing the responsiveness and authenticity of social work practice (Guo & Liang, 2024). In some instances, the professional presentation and practices of social work practitioners do not align with contemporary cultural trends, thereby limiting their ability to effectively meet the evolving needs and expectations of client systems (Liu et al., 2020). Many social work agencies emphasize professionalism through the implementation of standardized practices aimed at achieving agency-specific goals (Liu et al., 2020). The effective use of available resources, adequate funding, accurate information, efficient time management, and strategic treatment planning are all viewed as essential components that contribute to enhancing the professionalization of the social work field (Liu et al., 2020). Findings from one study highlight the importance of incorporating feedback from social work practitioners to inform the modification of organizational policies, ensuring greater alignment with the needs and experiences of practitioners rather than solely prioritizing agency-wide objectives (Liu et al., 2020).

The application of systems theory in professional social work practice has spanned approximately five decades (Singh et al., 2022). This theoretical framework emphasizes that

systems are composed of interrelated and interdependent components, each essential to the overall functioning of the whole (Singh et al., 2022). Traditionally employed in casework, systems theory facilitates a comprehensive assessment of individuals, their environments, and the dynamic changes affecting their well-being (Singh et al., 2022). Beyond case-level practice, systems theory also offers valuable guidance at the organizational and professional levels, informing how social work practitioners and institutions respond to complex, multilayered challenges (Singh et al., 2022). It is essential for employees within organizations to recognize the significance of diverse workplace cultures that respond proactively to evolving societal trends (Derrick et al., 2021). For instance, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, a substantial number of organizations rapidly adapted their work environments to minimize exposure to the virus while simultaneously ensuring the continuity of essential services and care delivery (Derrick et al., 2021). Elements such as collective leadership, responsiveness, dynamic interactions between social workers and the intended service beneficiaries, as well as critical reflection, play a significant role in facilitating organizational initiatives during periods of considerable uncertainty globally (Obsurn et al., 2021).

The literature emphasizes that social recognition should be integrated as a core component of enhancing social workers' well-being in the workplace (Lopez Pelaez et al., 2023). Providing supportive and equitable work environments is framed not only as a best practice but also as a moral and legal responsibility of employing organizations (Lopez Pelaez et al., 2023). Conditions such as persistent poverty and inadequate wages negatively impact both client populations and the social workers tasked with delivering services amid global and economic crises (Lopez Pelaez et al., 2023). The need for additional training is also highlighted as essential to addressing employment-related social exclusion and fostering greater inclusion within the workforce (Lopez Pelaez et al., 2023). The intersection of professional vulnerability

and precarious working conditions substantially impacts the overall health, well-being, and levels of burnout experienced by social work practitioners (Lopez Pelaez et al., 2023). Employers play a critical role in shaping policies that reflect organizational culture and are designed to enhance job quality, particularly for social work professionals (Lopez Pelaez et al., 2023).

The field of social work is significantly influenced by the bureaucratic measures implemented at various organizational levels, including local, state, and federal (Ferguson et al., 2022). The literature highlights that the global response of the social work profession to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly reshaped traditional practice values, with implications expected to endure for years to come (Ferguson et al., 2022). The integration of technology and the implementation of rapid response strategies to ensure continuity of care have contributed to a revitalized model of professional practice, ultimately enhancing outcomes for service users for the foreseeable future (Ferguson et al., 2022). Social work practitioners exemplify the capacity to navigate uncertainty and respond to the unpredictable nature of future challenges, reflecting a commitment to adaptability and resilience in practice (Ferguson et al., 2022). Social workers are often recognized for their ability to improvise, relying on intuition, established practices, and professional courage more than strictly adhering to organizational protocols (Ferguson et al., 2022). Over time, such improvisational practices may become integrated into the daily routines of social workers and eventually formalized within organizational policies, including those adopted by governmental agencies (Ferguson et al., 2022).

In recent years, social service agencies have experienced an influx of increased workloads and stress-related challenges, contributing to elevated turnover rates among social workers (Geisler et al., 2019). A substantial body of research identifies key professional factors

contributing to turnover among social workers (Geisler et al., 2019). Conversely, social workers who remain in their roles often report a sense of professional fulfillment and a strong sense of organizational belonging (Geisler et al., 2019). Understanding the intrinsic factors that contribute to positive job satisfaction can offer valuable insights for initiatives aimed at improving employee retention within the social work profession (Geisler et al., 2019). Social work practitioners increasingly face the challenge of meeting organizational demands by working longer hours, intensifying their workload, or, in some cases, compromising the quality of services delivered (Geisler et al., 2019). The existing empirical literature has not adequately explored the importance of work quality for social work practitioners and its impact on critical outcomes, including workplace engagement, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment (Geisler et al., 2019).

Mainstream organizations that employ professionals in emotionally demanding fields, such as social work, should prioritize fostering professional growth and cultivating positive workplace experiences (Garmendia et al., 2023). Workplace social supports have been shown to alleviate emotional exhaustion among employees (Garmendia et al., 2023). Levels of job satisfaction are often associated with the presence of such supports, as well as factors including professional experience, demographic characteristics such as age, and the degree of autonomy afforded to practitioners (Garmendia et al., 2023). Positive experiences of social support within the workplace can contribute to healthier organizational environments, often resulting in higher levels of job satisfaction (Garmendia et al., 2023). For some professionals, particularly those in emotionally intensive roles, detaching from their professional responsibilities can be difficult; however, a supportive network may provide valuable guidance and strategies for achieving this necessary balance (Garmendia et al., 2023).

Alignment of the Project with the Literature and Discipline

The practice of social work as a clinical social worker frequently exhibits an unpredictable character, encompassing a variety of circumstances such as client emergencies, provider-related challenges, organizational transformations, and natural fluctuations that occur as integral components of the planned change process (Levin et al., 2020; Powers et al., 2021). There is a notable absence of targeted strategies aimed at enhancing job satisfaction and improving workplace retention among millennial clinical social workers (Jutengren et al., 2020). Millennials constitute an increasingly significant demographic of professionals who are making substantial contributions across various fields of practice, a trend that is anticipated to grow as employees from other generations begin to retire (Negoro & Wibowo, 2021; Roberts, 2019). This cohort displays characteristics that markedly differ from those of previous generational groups, particularly in their perspectives on professional work and their sense of belonging within organizations (Pereira et al., 2024). In the domain of social work, millennials have been instrumental in integrating technology into traditional practice models, thereby addressing the needs of clients during the COVID-19 pandemic (Derrick et al., 2021; Ferguson et al., 2022). While previous studies examining the millennial demographic have identified key generational traits that enhance overall job satisfaction and workplace retention, they have largely overlooked the population of clinical social workers (Easton & Steyn, 2022; Sebastian & Virani, 2021; Waltz et al., 2020). Members of this demographic exhibit a profound desire for harmonious workplace environments in which they feel valued and included. Additionally, millennials prioritize work-life balance and advocate for flexible work schedules, self-care, and adequate periods of rest (Garmendia et al., 2023; Hudiono & Sari, 2022). Social workers within this demographic recognize that many professional organizations have transitioned towards a business-oriented model of social work practice, which often prioritizes profit and

organizational prestige over client and provider welfare (Hassan et al., 2024). This cohort expresses a strong inclination to emphasize the provision of quality services to clients, rather than merely meeting demanding caseload requirements (Geisler et al., 2019).

Process

Project Questions

This qualitative action research study explored the lived experiences of millennial clinical social workers by examining their personal narratives to address the following research questions:

- How do millennial clinical social workers describe their experience of job satisfaction as mental health providers?

- What contributing factors lead to workplace retention as a millennial clinical social worker?

The following are the questions that served as the foundation for the semi-formal interview for three participant groups that include millennial clinical social workers, millennial clinical supervisors and millennial social work administrators:

For the millennial clinical social worker group:

- What factors make job satisfaction a prevalent social issue among millennial

clinical social workers?

- Can you share specific methods or interventions you have personally employed in

your professional practice to address the issue of job satisfaction?

- To what extent have your strategies successfully contributed to job satisfaction

among millennial clinical social workers?

- From a broader perspective, what key strategies do millennial social workers generally

advocate for job satisfaction and workplace retention?

- How, in your experience, do millennial clinical social workers effectively navigate and address retention within the workplace setting?

For the millennial clinical supervisor group:

- How can the impact of generational cultures be efficiently harnessed among millennial clinical social workers, thereby enhancing job satisfaction?

- What significance does the investigation of job satisfaction and workplace retention hold for millennial clinical social work, and why is it imperative to address this issue?

- Could you furnish instances of particular clinical intervention strategies that have demonstrated efficacy in mitigating job satisfaction and workplace retention challenges faced by millennial clinical social work professionals within your practice?

- From an oversight perspective, what measures should social work supervisors implement to foster workplace retention among millennial clinical social workers?

- What strategies are recommended for the social work profession to adopt in order to enhance job satisfaction and promote retention within the millennial clinical social worker demographic?

For the millennial social work administrator group:

- Within the realm of social work administration, what particular strategies and techniques are presently utilized to support millennial clinical social workers in tackling the challenges associated with job satisfaction and maintaining employment?

- In your professional setting, which theoretical approaches have demonstrated efficacy in enhancing the lived experience of job satisfaction and promoting workplace retention among millennial clinical social work practitioners?

- How well do current strategies for retaining millennial clinical social workers in the workplace correspond with recognized best practices, and what recommendations can be made for enhancement?

- How can the principles of systems theory be practically implemented across the micro, mezzo, and macro dimensions of social work to efficiently address the job satisfaction levels experienced by millennial clinical social work professionals?

- What are the essential tools and resources required by social workers and their intended beneficiaries to jointly and efficiently address the challenge of retaining millennial clinical social work professionals in the workplace?

Project Design/Method

This qualitative action research project adopted a generic qualitative methodology grounded in a constructivist paradigm to address the research question. Constructivism, commonly associated with qualitative research, emphasizes the belief that individuals construct unique and complex understandings of their world (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019). This epistemological stance acknowledges that reality is socially constructed through individual experiences and interactions, which are best captured through narrative and interpretive means (Peck & Mummery, 2018). Within this framework, the researcher engaged with participants to co-construct meaning, drawing on their subjective perspectives to interpret findings (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019). Action research is a systematic, reflective process undertaken by practitioners to investigate and improve their own professional practices in contextually relevant settings (Chen, 2022; Galvin et al., 2020). Typically conducted by individuals who are directly involved in the practice being studied, action research aimed to solve real-world problems through iterative cycles of planning, action, observation, and reflection (Ai et al., 2020; Pregmark et al., 2023). As such, this methodology is well-suited to exploring the dynamics of job satisfaction and workplace retention among millennial clinical social workers, a population of particular interest to the researcher.

Qualitative research, informed by the contributions of scholars across disciplines, continues to evolve as a philosophical and methodological approach that reveals rich, in-depth understandings of human experiences, beliefs, and behaviors (Peck & Mummery, 2018). The constructivist worldview aligned with the goals of this study by providing a framework through which participants can articulate their personal experiences of professional fulfillment and organizational commitment. By privileging the voices of millennial clinical social workers, this research uncovered the underlying factors that influence their job satisfaction and retention within the workplace. Within the broader constructivist tradition, narrative inquiry is particularly effective in capturing the complexity and nuance of lived human experiences (Ntinda, 2018). Narratives serve as a means through which individuals make sense of their world, with language, both spoken and written, functioning as the primary medium for expressing and understanding experience (Peck & Mummery, 2018). Narrative research entailed an exploration of the relational dynamics between the researcher and participants, the purpose and scope of the study, and the interpretive process through which meaning is derived from participants' accounts (Ntinda, 2018).

By engaging with participants' narratives, the researcher identified salient themes and meanings embedded within their accounts, while remaining attentive to the authenticity and accuracy of representation (Peck & Mummery, 2018). Narrative inquiry is suited to the aims of this study, as it allows participants to share their experiences of job satisfaction and workplace retention without presupposing specific interpretations. This methodological approach enabled a deeper understanding of the personal and professional realities faced by millennial clinical social workers, providing valuable insights for enhancing organizational practices and supporting workforce sustainability.

Stakeholders, Participants, and Target Audience

To generate informed recommendations that promote job satisfaction and workplace retention among millennial clinical social workers, this study employed qualitative interviews with three key stakeholder groups. These groups include millennial clinical social workers, millennial clinical supervisors, and millennial social work administrators, such as executive directors. The inclusion of these distinct yet interconnected perspectives enabled a comprehensive understanding of the organizational and professional dynamics influencing millennial engagement and retention. Specifically, clinical supervisors within mental health settings, administrative leaders in social work, and practicing millennial mental health professionals were engaged to provide nuanced insights into their respective roles and experiences. Their collective contributions enrich the data by reflecting multiple layers of influence within the social work profession.

Millennials now comprise a significant proportion of the workforce and are often drawn to organizations that offer a sense of purpose and a tangible impact on the broader global community (Ngotngamwong, 2020). Within the field of social work, minority millennial practitioners frequently encounter unique challenges related to job satisfaction, retention, and workplace environments shaped by their sociocultural backgrounds and lived experiences (Jones et al., 2022). Clinical supervisors play a critical role in supporting social workers' professional development by enhancing their clinical competencies, guiding them through complex client situations, and upholding the delivery of high-quality care (King et al., 2020; Snowdon et al., 2020). Additionally, social work administrators provide oversight on both clinical and organizational matters, including job satisfaction, staff retention, service quality, client safety, privacy, and professional accountability (Green et al., 2020; Monaghesh & Hajizadeh, 2020). These supervisory and administrative functions are essential in shaping a workplace culture that supports the growth and retention of millennial clinical social workers.

Role of the Researcher

Qualitative research has historically faced criticism for its potential to introduce preconceived assumptions that may limit the depth and spontaneity of meaning-making derived from participants' unexpected or unanticipated experiences (Mwita, 2022). Nevertheless, qualitative methodologies are uniquely positioned to capture the human dimension of inquiry, often emphasizing rich, interactive engagement with participants (Mwita, 2022). Researcher bias frequently emerges as a significant concern within qualitative research, primarily due to the role of the researcher as the instrument of inquiry (Jones & Donmoyer, 2020). In this study, the researcher acknowledged his professional background as a millennial clinical social worker, clinical supervisor, and social work administrator. This shared generational and professional identity offered both insight and potential influence, making reflexivity a critical component of the research process. Reflexivity refers to the researcher's continuous self-examination of their role and influence in shaping the research context, as well as the impact of the research experience on their own perspectives. As noted by Mackieson et al. (2019), reflexivity is essential for enhancing the rigor and minimizing bias in qualitative social work research.

The overarching aim of qualitative research, particularly in social work, is to explore, understand, explain, and clarify individuals' lived experiences, including their emotions, perceptions, values, beliefs, and attitudes (Mwita, 2022). This process is informed by the researcher's paradigm, a conceptual lens through which the world and the research problem are interpreted (Mwita, 2022). Initially, the researcher believed that concerns regarding job satisfaction and workplace retention among millennial clinical social workers were unique to his current workplace in Louisiana. However, in conducting the study, he remained open to diverse perspectives and refrained from influencing participant responses. Adhering strictly to

the approved questionnaire and maintaining participant anonymity, the researcher sought to ensure the integrity and neutrality of the data collection process.

Sample

<div align="center">

Project Study Protocol

</div>

This study employed a purposive sampling strategy to select participants who meet specific inclusion criteria relevant to the research objectives. Purposive sampling involves the intentional selection of individuals based on their expertise, experiences, or characteristics that align with the focus of the study (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). This method enabled the researcher to gather rich, relevant data from participants who possess in-depth knowledge of the research topic. As noted by Johnson et al. (2020), purposive sampling facilitates the collection of information that directly addresses the research question by targeting individuals with specialized insights into the field of interest. By concentrating on participants with relevant professional backgrounds, the researcher ensured that the responses are meaningful and aligned with the lived experiences of the population under study. To enhance participant recruitment, particularly in cases where access to qualified individuals is limited, snowball sampling was utilized as a supplementary strategy. Snowball sampling is commonly employed to reach hidden or hard-to-access populations, especially when researching sensitive, controversial, or stigmatized topics (Dosek, 2021). In this study, it served as an effective mechanism for identifying additional participants through referrals from initial respondents.

The sample size included 15 participants, consistent with purposive sampling principles and appropriate for the depth-oriented nature of qualitative inquiry. This is based on the

inclusion of five millennial clinical social workers, five millennial clinical supervisors, and five millennial social work administrators' participant groups. While no universally agreed-upon minimum sample size exists for qualitative research, studies have shown that rich thematic data and meaningful patterns can emerge from relatively small, well-selected samples (Young & Casey, 2018). Given the study's scope and available resources, this sample size yielded sufficient insight into the factors influencing job satisfaction and workplace retention among millennial clinical social workers. Ultimately, purposive sampling ensured that the most relevant sources of evidence-based data are used to meet the aims of research (Johnson et al., 2020).

Data Collection

This study employed a qualitative methodology to collect and evaluate data. The recruitment process is specified below for each of the categories of participants. Millennial Clinical Social Workers: For this study, purposive sampling was utilized. Millennial social workers were recruited through social media platform of Facebook (e.g., Millennials in Social Work, Black Men in Social Work group, Black Girls in Social Work group). Participants in this study were not required to self-identify as belonging to a minority or as being part of the Black, Indigenous Person of Color (BIPOC) community. The aforementioned groups were utilized as illustrative examples of potential social media communities from which participants were sourced. Participants in this study met the inclusion criteria, which included having a minimum of six months of experience as a licensed clinical social worker and self-ascribing as a millennial. Participants who met the criteria for this study were contacted through email or telephone. If a participant agreed to take part in the study, they received an email confirming their intention to take part. Participant interviews were conducted in a virtual environment, and

the manner in which the interview is conducted was contingent upon the individual's comfort level.

Millennial Clinical Supervisors: Clinical Supervisors designated as LCSW-S, LCSW-BACS, and LCSW-C were recruited through social media platforms. Participants in this study met the inclusion criteria, which include having a minimum of two years of supervisory experience as a licensed clinical social worker. Participants who met the criteria for this study were contacted through email or telephone. If a participant agreed to take part in the study, they received an email confirming their intention to take part. Participant interviews were conducted in a virtual environment, and the manner in which the interview is conducted was contingent upon the individual's comfort level.

Millennial Social Work Administrators: Social Work Administrators in the field of social work who have been classified as an executive director, chief executive officer, supervisor, team leader, program coordinator or clinical associate were recruited through social media platforms. In order to be eligible to participate in this study, applicants met the inclusion requirements, which included a minimum of six months of experience as an administrator. Participants who met the criteria for this study were contacted through email or telephone. If a participant agreed to take part in the study, they received an email confirming their intention to take part. Participant interviews were conducted in a virtual environment, and the manner in which the interview is conducted was contingent upon the individual's comfort level. People who are personally acquainted with the researcher were excluded from participation in this study.

The millennial clinical social worker group was selected through purposive sampling from minority Licensed Clinical Social Workers (LCSWs) across the United States using the

social media platform, Facebook. This researcher based the selection of participants for this group on public data and received approval from the social media site administrator and IRB. Once the sample was identified, this researcher received the contact details and initiated communication with the group via email. Individuals who agreed to take part in the study were contacted by this researcher to obtain additional information regarding the study. Interviews with participants were conducted in a virtual environment using Zoom at the convenience of the sample group. Zoom's audio recording capabilities were relied upon to capture data for future use and analysis.

The millennial clinical supervisor group was selected through purposive sampling from LCSW Clinical Supervisors across the United States, using the social media platform LinkedIn. This researcher based the selection of participants for this group on public data and received approval from the social media site administrator and IRB. Once the sample was identified, this researcher received the contact details and initiated communication with the group via email. Individuals who agreed to take part in the study were individually contacted by this researcher to obtain additional information regarding the study. Interviews with participants were conducted in a virtual environment using Zoom at the convenience of the sample group. Zoom's audio and video recording capabilities were relied upon to capture data for future use and analysis.

The millennial social work administrator group was selected through purposive sampling from social work administrators across the United States using the social media platform LinkedIn. This researcher based the selection of participants for this group on public data and received approval from the social media site administrator and IRB. Once the sample was identified, this researcher received the contact details and initiated communication with the group via email. This researcher individually contacted individuals who agreed to take part

in the study to obtain additional information regarding the study. Interviews with participants were conducted in a virtual environment using Zoom at the convenience of the sample group. Zoom's audio and video recording capabilities were relied upon to capture data for future use and analysis.

This project recruited five millennial clinical social workers, five millennial clinical supervisors, and five millennial social work administrators to participate in a study. To facilitate the recruitment process, a descriptive flyer was distributed on social media platforms, Facebook, and LinkedIn. This researcher ensured that each participant mets the inclusion requirements and provided informed consent prior to the interview. This researcher contacted interested participants to address any queries or apprehensions they may have and to arrange an interview. This research project proposed a qualitative methodology for the collection of data, which involved one-to-one semi-structured interviews, to gain insight into the factors which contribute to job satisfaction and workplace retention among millennial clinical social workers. Procedures were implemented to ensure the ethical and responsible collection, analysis, and preservation of data. The chosen method of data collection was based on virtual interactions with participants in the research. Consent was obtained prior to data collection. Participants in the study were required to complete a consent form stating their intention to take part in the study, in accordance with Capella IRB. The researcher assessed the participants' understanding of the semi-structured interview dynamics, expectations, and utilization of research findings. All study participants were able to conveniently schedule the virtual interviews.

This study adopted a qualitative methodology to collect and analyze data, emphasizing depth over breadth in exploring the lived experiences of millennial clinical social workers, clinical supervisors, and social work administrators (N = 15). While the limited sample size is

a recognized limitation, it aligns with the objectives of qualitative inquiry, which prioritize rich, context-specific understanding over broad generalizability (Anderson & Glebova, 2022). Small-sample designs, characterized by an intensive focus on each participant, enable researchers to capture the complexity and nuance of the phenomenon under investigation. Though such designs may not support statistical generalization, they offer valuable insights into specific populations, relevant practice challenges, and potential interventions (Anderson & Glebova, 2022). Qualitative research is grounded in constructivist epistemology, which posits that reality and knowledge are socially constructed and contextually interpreted (Richardson et al., 2022). Accordingly, this study assumed that participants' perceptions are central to understanding the phenomenon of job satisfaction and workplace retention. Reflexivity and the inclusion of participant perspectives are essential to maintaining validity and credibility in qualitative research (Creswell & Miller, 2000). One of the key strategies used to ensure trustworthiness is triangulation, the convergence of multiple data sources or perspectives to enhance the depth and credibility of findings (Natow, 2020; Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Although generalizability is inherently limited in small-scale qualitative studies, their strength lies in the production of rich, detailed accounts that provide insight into uncommon or underexplored experiences (Young & Casey, 2018; Anderson & Glebova, 2022). Studies have shown that sample sizes exceeding 18 participants often yield diminishing returns in terms of novel data (Anderson & Glebova, 2022). Therefore, a carefully selected sample of 12 to 15 participants was appropriate for this study's scope and purpose. Detailed descriptions of participants, settings, and emergent themes further support the study's credibility (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Semi-structured interviews, allowed for flexibility and depth in responses, are an optimal method for eliciting participants' unique perspectives (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik,

2021). Semi-structured interviews are the preferred method of data collection when the objective is to gain deeper insight into individual perspectives rather than to develop a broad, generalized understanding of a phenomenon (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). This method allowed participants the flexibility to express their thoughts in their own words, while also providing the researcher with a structured framework to guide the conversation. The approach aligned well with phenomenological inquiry, which sought to uncover and interpret the meaning of human experiences from the perspective of those who live them (Farooq et al., 2023). Phenomenology recognizes that individuals' understandings are shaped by cultural, environmental, social, and historical contexts, which can lead to significant variation in experiences across geographic regions and demographic groups (Husband, 2020). This makes it especially well-suited for exploring complex and subjective constructs such as job satisfaction and workplace retention.

Video conferencing platforms such as Zoom have become increasingly popular for conducting qualitative interviews, offering cost-effective and practical solutions for engaging participants from diverse locations (Gray et al., 2020). Zoom provided several advantages, including ease of access, audio and video recording capabilities, and integrated transcription tools, which streamline the data collection process. Moreover, researchers enhance the quality and confidentiality of interviews by conducting them in private, distraction-free environments and encouraging participants to do the same (Gray et al., 2020). These practices contributed to both the ethical integrity and methodological rigor of the study.

To evaluate the data collection instruments, a field test was completed with field experts and the interview questions were edited based on their feedback:

1.   Darrian D. Dawson, DSW, LCSW- Psychotherapist.

2.		Michael D. Gatson, MSW, PhD- Veterans Center Director.

3.		Terrance T. Jones, MSW, LCSW- Psychotherapist.

The subsequent inquiries were employed to evaluate participants for their eligibility to be included in the research study, each inquiry required an answer of yes to be considered for eligibility in this project:

For the millennial clinical social worker group:

1. Are you a millennial, defined as an individual born between the years 1980 and 2000, and hold a licensure as a clinical social worker?

2. Can you formally confirm your employment as a clinical social worker?

3. Do you possess at least six months of professional experience as a millennial clinical social worker?

For the millennial clinical supervisor group:

1. Are you a millennial, defined as an individual born between the years 1980 and 2000, and hold a licensure as a clinical social worker?

2. Can you formally confirm your employment status as a clinical supervisor in social work?

3. Do you possess at least two years of professional experience as a millennial clinical supervisor?

For the millennial social work administrator group:

1. Are you a millennial, defined as an individual born between the years 1980 and 2000, and hold a licensure as a clinical social worker?

2. Can you formally confirm your employment status as a social work administrator?

3. Do you possess at least six months of professional experience as a millennial social work administrator?

The following steps were employed by the researcher during the data collection process:

1. Participants were contacted via phone or email to obtain their consent and to arrange a time for a virtual meeting.

2. Participants were provided with information regarding the research study procedure and timelines during the interview.

3. This researcher facilitated introductions, explained the objectives of the research, and welcomed the participants by expressing gratitude for their participation.

4. The questionnaire was used to direct the semi-structured interview, with the aim of obtaining as much information as possible.

5. At the conclusion of the interview, the researcher expressed gratitude for their involvement in the study.

6. The researcher asked the participants if they have any follow-up questions or concerns regarding the study.

7.   This researcher utilized the audio recording transcript produced by Zoom and analyzed it for accuracy while omitting any identifying features and names.

8.   This researcher provided participants with a copy of the transcript for review.

9.   The researcher conducted an analysis of the information contained in the transcripts generated by Zoom and the audio recording.

Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to established ethical principles governing research involving human subjects and data analysis. Prior to initiating the study, the research proposal was submitted for review and received approval by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to ensure compliance with ethical standards. The study did not involve individuals from vulnerable populations and does not pose significant risks to participants. In accordance with ethical research practice, informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. Informed consent ensured that individuals voluntarily participate in the study with a clear understanding of its purpose, procedures, and potential implications (Xu et al., 2020). Establishing trust and transparency with participants was essential and required sensitivity to cultural and social norms throughout the consent process (O'Sullivan et al., 2021).

Maintaining confidentiality and protecting participant identity are critical to fostering open and honest dialogue. Confidentiality was upheld through secure data storage, de-identification of transcripts, and restricted access to research materials (Moriña, 2021). Anonymity was maintained to the extent permitted by the nature of the qualitative methodology. In the context of increasing data use by organizations and institutions, the protection of participant privacy remains a paramount ethical responsibility (Mills, 2018).

Participants were fully informed about the procedures for data collection, storage, and reporting. They were provided with copies of their transcribed interviews and the final research report for review and approval to enhance transparency and accuracy. This researcher instituted the following withdrawal policy in compliance with Capella IRB guidelines: Should a participant decide to exit the study, they may request the removal of their data from analyses and its subsequent destruction. In cases where the study is not anonymous, participants are entitled to request a copy of their data. Additionally, participants may seek corrections if any discrepancies or omissions are identified.

As a social worker, the researcher is committed to the ethical standards outlined in the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics, including the principle of nonmaleficence, or the duty to do no harm (NASW, 2021). Although this study employs a qualitative methodology that emphasizes interpretive inquiry, the researcher-maintained objectivity and refrained from influencing participant responses or study outcomes. The information gathered during this investigation will be safely kept for a maximum of seven years on a password-protected laptop that is only accessible by the researcher. The information will be deleted in compliance with Capella University IRB guidelines.

Data Analysis

This qualitative study drew data from three stakeholder groups: millennial clinical social workers, millennial clinical supervisors, and millennial social work administrators. Data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews, which allowed for flexibility in responses and enable the researcher to gain deep insight into participants' individual experiences and perspectives. Interviews were conducted via Zoom, with audio recordings automatically transcribed to facilitate data analysis. A thematic analysis was employed to

examine the interview data. Thematic analysis is a widely used method in qualitative research for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns of meaning, or "themes," within textual data (Clarke & Braun, 2017). It offers flexibility across theoretical frameworks, research questions, sample sizes, data collection methods, and interpretive strategies (Clarke & Braun, 2017; Mackieson et al., 2019). The researcher utilized qualitative data analysis software to assist with organizing, coding, and identifying emergent themes in the dataset. Following Castleberry and Nolen's (2018) five-phase model, the thematic analysis process involved: gathering the process of transcribing and compiling interview data for analysis. Disassembling the process of breaking the data into meaningful units through open coding. Reassembling the process of grouping codes into broader categories or themes that represent recurring ideas across participants. Interpreting the process of deriving meaning from themes and patterns to address the research questions. Concluding the process of synthesizing findings to generate insights relevant to the research objectives.

Themes reflected patterned responses or shared meanings that emerged from the data and were be grounded in the participants' experiences. Thematic analysis is especially effective in exploring unstructured qualitative data and is appropriate for both small and large datasets, including those derived from case studies (Clarke & Braun, 2017). Reflexivity played a central role in maintaining the integrity and rigor of the research process. As the researcher shared a generational and professional identity with participants, reflexive practices were applied to remain critically aware of personal biases and their potential influence on data interpretation (Mackieson et al., 2019). Reflexivity also enhanced the study's transparency and credibility by acknowledging the researcher's dual role as both insider and analyst. Grounded in a constructivist paradigm, this study recognized that reality is socially constructed and interpreted through lived experiences (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019; Peck & Mummery, 2018). The

constructivist approach emphasized the value of participants' perspectives in shaping knowledge and supports the exploration of complex, context-bound phenomena such as job satisfaction and workplace retention. By allowing participants to articulate their views in their own terms, the study aimed to surface meaningful insights into the factors influencing millennial clinical social workers' engagement and retention.

In addition to interview data, the researcher incorporated document analysis where applicable, drawing on relevant organizational documents or professional literature to supplement participants' narratives (Clarke & Braun, 2017). As with other qualitative methods, document analysis offers both advantages and limitations and was used judiciously to enhance thematic depth rather than substitute for primary data (Mackieson et al., 2019). The ultimate goal of this research was to bridge the gap between knowledge and practice by producing findings that are robust, valid, and applicable to real-world social work settings (Roberts et al., 2019). The study identified recurring attributes contributing to job satisfaction and workplace retention among millennial clinical social workers and offer practical implications for supervision, administration, and organizational policy.

Findings and Application

Relevant Outcomes and Findings

Millennials now constitute a substantial portion of the contemporary workforce and are particularly attracted to organizations that promote a sense of purpose and foster meaningful contributions to the global community (Ngotngamwong, 2020). Within the field of social work, millennial practitioners from minority backgrounds often face distinctive challenges concerning job satisfaction, retention, and workplace dynamics, challenges that are frequently shaped by their sociocultural identities and lived experiences (Jones et al., 2022). Clinical

supervisors play a pivotal role in facilitating the professional development of social workers by strengthening clinical competencies, providing guidance in navigating complex client scenarios, and ensuring the consistent delivery of high-quality care (King et al., 2020; Snowdon et al., 2020). Moreover, social work administrators are responsible for overseeing both clinical and organizational domains, encompassing key areas such as employee satisfaction, workforce stability, service quality, client safety, confidentiality, and adherence to professional standards (Green et al., 2020; Monaghesh & Hajizadeh, 2020). Together, supervisory and administrative functions are instrumental in cultivating a workplace culture that supports the engagement, development, and retention of millennial clinical social workers.

This qualitative study drew on perspectives from three key stakeholder groups: millennial clinical social workers, millennial clinical supervisors, and millennial social work administrators. In social work research, qualitative methodologies are particularly valuable for exploring, understanding, and interpreting individuals' lived experiences, including their emotions, perceptions, values, and beliefs (Mwita, 2022). Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, which offered the flexibility to probe deeply into participants' insights while maintaining a consistent framework for analysis. Given the scope of the study and the available resources, the selected sample provided a sufficiently rich dataset to explore the factors influencing job satisfaction and retention among millennial clinical social workers. The use of purposive sampling ensured that participants with the most relevant knowledge and experience were included, thereby enhancing the validity and relevance of the study's findings (Johnson et al., 2020).

A thematic analysis was employed to examine the interview data, enabling the identification of patterns incorporated a document analysis, drawing on relevant organizational records and professional literature to contextualize and enrich participants' narratives (Clarke

& Braun, 2017). As with other qualitative methodologies, document analysis presents both strengths and limitations; therefore, it was used selectively and strategically to enhance thematic depth without replacing the primacy of interview data (Mackieson et al., 2019). The overarching aim of this research was to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application by generating findings that are methodologically sound, contextually valid, and directly applicable to real-world social work practice (Roberts et al., 2019). Specifically, the study sought to identify recurring factors that contribute to job satisfaction and workplace retention among millennial clinical social workers, offering actionable insights for supervision, administrative leadership, and organizational policy development.

This action research project aimed to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of millennial clinical social workers practicing in the United States. Participants shared personal narratives regarding their professional experiences as millennial clinical social workers, with the intention of addressing the following research questions:

R1 How do millennial clinical social workers characterize their experience of job satisfaction as mental health providers?

R2 What factors contribute to workplace retention among millennial clinical social workers?

This study employed semi-structured interviews as the primary method of data collection, targeting millennial clinical social workers, clinical supervisors, and social work administrators. The interviews were conducted virtually via Zoom and utilized open-ended questions to explore participants' professional experiences and gather recommendations related to job satisfaction and workplace retention among millennial clinical social workers. The demographic composition of this study consisted of 15 millennial clinical social workers, comprising 12 females and 3 males. A notable theme that emerged aligns with existing

literature indicating that social work remains a female-dominated profession, within which male practitioners often embody values that diverge significantly from those prevalent in mainstream culture and society (Alhuzail & Segez, 2019). These mental health professionals represent a diverse range of social work practice areas, including academia, private practice, community mental health, and employment within local, state, and federal government agencies across the United States. This divergence can present ethical challenges, as clinicians must navigate the integration of both personal and professional values, each critical to ethical and effective clinical practice (Alhuzail & Segez, 2019).

While each interview was scheduled for approximately one hour at the participant's convenience, many were shorter, with the average duration being approximately 15 minutes. This variation in interview duration did not compromise the depth or breadth of the data collected, as participants provided rich responses grounded in their lived experiences as millennial clinical social work practitioners. All interviews were conducted in a secure virtual environment and audio recorded, with transcripts reflecting participants' responses verbatim. Semi-structured interviews are a preferred method in qualitative research when the objective is to explore individual perspectives in depth rather than to generalize across a population (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). Rooted in phenomenological methodology, this approach sought to understand the lived experiences of individuals, recognizing that meaning is shaped by cultural, environmental, social, and historical contexts (Farooq et al., 2023; Husband, 2020). As such, perceptions of phenomena may vary significantly across different regions and communities (Farooq et al., 2023; Husband, 2020). The use of video conferencing, particularly Zoom, has proven to be a cost-effective and efficient tool for qualitative data collection with geographically dispersed participants (Gray et al., 2020). Zoom offers various features that

support confidentiality and minimize distractions, especially when researchers and participants engage from private, secure settings (Gray et al., 2020).

The millennial clinical social worker group was selected through purposive sampling from minority Licensed Clinical Social Workers (LCSWs) across the United States using the social media platform, Facebook. This researcher based the selection of participants for this group on public data and received approval from the social media site administrator and IRB. Once the sample was identified, this researcher received the contact details and initiated communication with the group via email. Individuals who agreed to take part in the study were individually contacted by this researcher to obtain additional information regarding the study. Consent was obtained prior to data collection. Participants in the study were required to complete a consent form stating their intention to take part in the study. Interviews with participants were conducted in a virtual environment using Zoom at the convenience of the sample group. Zoom's audio recording capabilities were relied upon to capture data for future use and analysis.

The millennial clinical supervisor group was selected through purposive sampling from LCSW Clinical Supervisors across the United States, using the social media platform Facebook. This researcher based the selection of participants for this group on public data and received approval from the social media site administrator and IRB. Once the sample was identified, this researcher received the contact details and initiated communication with the group via email. Individuals who agreed to take part in the study were individually contacted by this researcher to obtain additional information regarding the study. Consent was obtained prior to data collection. Participants in the study were required to complete a consent form stating their intention to take part in the study. Interviews with participants were conducted in

a virtual environment using Zoom at the convenience of the sample group. Zoom's audio recording capabilities were relied upon to capture data for future use and analysis.

The millennial social work administrator group was selected through purposive sampling from social work administrators across the United States using the social media platform Facebook. This researcher based the selection of participants for this group on public data and received approval from the social media site administrator and IRB. Once the sample was identified, this researcher received the contact details and initiated communication with the group via email. Individuals who agreed to take part in the study were individually contacted by this researcher to obtain additional information regarding the study. Consent was obtained prior to data collection. Participants in the study were required to complete a consent form stating their intention to take part in the study. Interviews with participants were conducted in a virtual environment using Zoom at the convenience of the sample group. Zoom's audio recording capabilities were relied upon to capture data for future use and analysis.

The following steps will be employed by the researcher during the data collection process:

- Participants were contacted via phone or email to obtain their consent and to arrange a time for a virtual meeting.

- Participants were provided with information regarding the research study procedure and timelines during the interview.

- This researcher facilitated introductions, explained the objectives of the research, and welcomed the participants by expressing gratitude for their participation.

- The questionnaire was used to direct the semi-structured interview, with the aim of obtaining as much information as possible.

- At the conclusion of the interview, the researcher expressed gratitude for their involvement in the study.

- The researcher asked the participants if they have any follow-up questions or concerns regarding the study.

- The researcher utilized the audio recording transcript produced by Zoom and analyzed it for accuracy while omitting any identifying features and names.

- The researcher provided participants with a copy of the transcript for review.

- The researcher conducted an analysis of the information contained in the transcripts generated by Zoom and the audio recording.

The three primary data sources for this study consisted of millennial clinical social workers, millennial clinical supervisors, and millennial social work administrators. A thematic analysis was employed to analyze the data obtained from the semi-structured interviews, utilizing NVivo. Audio transcripts generated by Zoom served as the basis for data analysis, allowing for the identification of patterns and themes across participant responses. The researcher anticipates that this study highlighted key attributes which contribute to job satisfaction and workplace retention among millennial clinical social workers. In qualitative and mixed-methods research, social work scholars frequently collect and analyze textual data, often incorporating document analysis as a methodological tool and drawing on pre-existing documents as valuable sources of information (Clarke & Braun, 2017). Like other qualitative

approaches, document analysis offers several advantages, such as accessibility and cost-effectiveness, but it also presents certain limitations, including issues related to authenticity and relevance (Mackieson et al., 2019). Qualitative data are typically unstructured in nature, requiring systematic approaches to interpretation (Mackieson et al., 2019). Thematic analysis is particularly well-suited for analyzing both small and large qualitative data sets, including those derived from case study research, due to its flexibility and applicability across various forms of data (Clarke & Braun, 2017).

The researcher employed thematic analysis utilizing Nvivo to interpret the social phenomena influencing job satisfaction and workplace retention among millennial clinical social workers (Rose et al., 2024). A comprehensive analysis of data derived from semi-structured interviews with research participants was conducted, emphasizing salient themes (Jones et al., 2020). Three stakeholder participants, comprising millennial clinical social workers, offered personal insights regarding the attributes contributing to job satisfaction and workplace retention. The researcher took measures to ensure that bias did not unduly affect the data collected during the semi-structured interviews, as each participant group was posed the same question tailored to their respective roles as millennial clinical social workers, millennial clinical supervisors, or millennial social work administrators.

Several key themes emerged from the data analysis of the transcripts generated from the semi-structured interviews. All millennial social work participants consistently emphasized a desire for flexible workplace environments that prioritize self-care, offer professional fulfillment and intellectual challenge, and promote ongoing collaboration among colleagues. Millennial clinical social work participants reported notable generational differences compared to previous cohorts, often expressing a preference for work environments that are adaptable to change, environments that not only serve the best interests of clients but also support the well-

being and professional growth of practitioners. Millennial clinical social work participants also emphasized the importance of pay equity as a key factor in workplace retention, advocating for compensation that aligns with industry standards and accounts for regional variations and fluctuations in the cost of living. Millennial social work clinical supervisor participants also expressed a strong desire for ongoing supervision and consultation, emphasizing the value of mentorship and knowledge-sharing across generational lines. They noted that millennials often hold a different perspective on professional longevity, favoring collaborative environments that encourage the exchange of information and support continuous learning among colleagues. Millennial social work administrator participants emphasized the importance of aligning professional values with those commonly associated with their generational cohort. They highlighted the integration of technology into practice and the desire for autonomy, specifically, the ability to work independently without excessive oversight, as critical components of a supportive and effective work environment.

'I think more flexibility and more trust more autonomy. Of course, accountability is important, so I'm not saying, like, a complete hands-off approach, but if you're working with those persons or you are supervising persons who have proven themselves to be'. MCSW participant.

'When we're looking at. Job satisfaction. It's this idea. I hear from a lot of people older than me. In my work world. This idea of students. Being recruited into child welfare. And wanting them to be career workers. This idea that they should be in the same job. For years and years and years'. MCSW participant.

'The thing is, now some of the pay equity has to get up there, right with around that we have some things around the exam and other stuff that impact ongoing, everyday work' MCS participant.

'Talking amongst ourselves. Collaborating with each other and being honest about things that probably more so in the past, were a little bit taboo to even talk about or was sort of discouraged. Maybe per policy or things like that, to not even have conversations about that. Millennials are more open to have the conversation and brave enough'. MCS participant.

'And so for me, I think one way that it can more efficiently be harnessed is by social workers from older generations than millennial social workers being willing to lean into the space of openly sharing the information that they've gained through their career and their professional experience'. MSA participant.

'They don't feel like they have upper mobility. They don't have client autonomy, high caseloads. Work life bounds are not together, then that speaks to the state of the system to which they are operating in and how they are professionally not feeling that they are supportive enough to do the work that they need to do, or in a realm of not feeling fulfilled and not feeling like they're making an effective change on anybody's life because they'. MSA participant.

In relation to workplace retention among millennial social work practitioners, several key themes emerged. Millennial clinical social workers expressed a desire to integrate personal values and attributes into their professional roles, emphasizing the importance of work-life balance within diverse practice settings. Clinical supervisor participants noted that retention efforts must extend beyond financial compensation and instead be tailored to the individual

needs and motivations of each employee. They also recognized that employment duration is increasingly viewed through the lens of personal career trajectory, with some individuals intentionally seeking short-term roles while others pursue long-term commitments. Millennial social work administrators highlighted the importance of self-advocacy across all generational cohorts, encouraging practitioners to align their personal needs with agency goals while maintaining ethical standards in client care.

'For the newer generations of social workers that are coming, so we know how to address the needs. Of those social workers in work environments, but it's also important to be able to have this type of empirical data to provide to the workplaces' MCSW participant.

'I worked in this space for one year and I learned that it was not the right fit. For me. And then I sought out what I felt like would be a better fit for me. I know in my back supervision'. MCSW participant.

'And another thing is pay. Job. Actually, I think that just being millennials, like, yo. We want to get out there and we want to get it. We're in a helping profession. That's great. However. We know that our work is valuable, and not everybody can do this'. MCS participant.

'I would say anti hustle culture. Maybe have one or two jobs versus three or four. And that usually sometimes looks at I need to go find a new job. I need to find one or two jobs that's more stable, with stable income. That allows me to practice in a way that I feel better in the workplace'. MCS participant.

'Definitely fair compensation. Work life balance. Prevention of burnout. And more manageable client caseloads are definitely probably the top things that we advocate for'. MCSW participant

'Different things, these different intersectionalities, different identities. If you don't care about our social work, millennial social workers in that space. They're going to leave. They're going to leave and find new jobs, and most likely you don't care about building a social worker. Then you don't care about the clients like that because of the way the world'. MSA participant.

'The technology that's being used. I think that it's very important. That the boards keep up with the time to help us understand what our needs look like as it relates to. Advancements in technology. And always advocacy'. MSA participant.

'Workplace policies that really aligned with the mental health of clinicians. That burnout that we see can be reduced and that we can have the better retention with. Our millennial clinical social workers'. MSA participant.

'Developmental opportunities, whether that is their benefits package or whether that's, like, extra pay time off. Just listen to. Their needs in an ever-changing market, I guess you could say. In my profession'. MCS participant.

'And ongoing professional development is still very important to us. And so if we're able to get that supervision and consultation in the workplace, it's definitely an amazing attribute to have in the workplace' MCSW participant.

The study was grounded in systems theory, while also referencing the person-in-environment perspective prevalent in social work practice. Ultimately, the interests of the

group are prioritized as a fundamental principle over the individual interests of its members (Singh et al., 2022). This theoretical orientation offers a valuable framework for guiding professional social work practice, particularly within the context of an increasingly dynamic and culturally diverse global landscape (Singh et al., 2022). The theoretical framework of the person in environment has evolved over approximately 70 years, emphasizing the reciprocal relationship between individuals and their environments (Lei et al., 2021). Its societal orientation provided the foundation for the profession's grassroots efforts, promoting an individualized approach to understanding the root causes and underlying functions of social problems (Lei et al., 2021). Systems theory proved to be a valuable framework in guiding this investigation into job satisfaction and workplace retention among millennial clinical social workers.

Application and Benefits

The social work profession stands to gain valuable insights from the lived experiences of millennial clinical social workers, particularly regarding the attributes that contribute to job satisfaction and workplace retention. It is the researcher's hope that social work employers will consider the themes identified in this study and implement the corresponding recommendations which are acknowledged in the resource guide to enhance job satisfaction and retention among millennial clinicians. Moreover, the findings of this research hold relevance beyond the field of social work and could be applied across various professional disciplines seeking to address similar workforce challenges. The findings of this study contribute to the growing body of empirical research highlighting the distinct characteristics of millennials within the global workforce, particularly in the context of a rapidly transforming society (Yunita, 2023). Previous studies have acknowledged that millennials are poised to comprise the majority of the workforce in the near future, underscoring the urgency for organizations to implement effective

strategies aimed at retaining this generational cohort (He et al., 2019; Roberts, 2019; Waltz et al., 2020).

This research project addressed a gap in the professional literature by capturing the lived experiences of millennial clinical social workers and identifying key attributes that contribute to their job satisfaction and workplace retention. Grounded in systems theory, a foundational framework in professional social work practice. This study underscored the significance of individual contributions within larger organizational systems (Cox et al., 2022). Systems theory emphasizes the interdependence of individuals and the broader structures in which they operate, highlighting the need for alignment to ensure systemic efficiency (Cox et al., 2022). While clinical social work is well established within mainstream culture, it continues to evolve and gain prominence, necessitating ongoing adaptation as the workforce becomes increasingly diverse (Francis et al., 2020).

Social work practice has frequently been associated with state-based child protection services, often overlooking the full scope and autonomy of independently licensed practitioners, such as Licensed Clinical Social Workers (LCSWs) (Steggall & Scollen, 2024). Historically, the profession has been rooted in bureaucratic systems characterized by high rates of professional burnout and employee turnover (Chiarelli-Helminiak et al., 2021; Watson & Begun, 2025). This study aimed to clarify and elevate the lived experiences of job satisfaction and workplace retention among independent practitioners, with a specific focus on millennial LCSWs. While a substantial body of research documents the prevalence of burnout and the importance of self-care in the social work profession, there is a relative scarcity of studies that explore the perspectives of millennial social workers and their evolving views on career satisfaction, longevity, and professional identity (Miller & Grise-Owens, 2021).

The workforce of Licensed Clinical Social Workers (LCSWs) is expanding across generational lines and continually adapting to meet the evolving needs of diverse client populations (Polinsky et al., 2022). The NASW Code of Ethics provides a foundational ethical framework for social work practice, particularly within individualized and family-based contexts (Gross, 2024; NASW, 2021). Recent revisions to the Code have incorporated updated language emphasizing cultural competency and the importance of practitioner self-care, reflecting evolving expectations within the profession (Gross, 2024; NASW, 2021). Social workers often develop their understanding of ethical standards through professional education and mentorship, with clinical supervisors playing a critical role in shaping practitioners' ethical perspectives and professional values. However, some scholars argue that the NASW Code of Ethics, in its current form, does not fully capture the complexity of global social work practice, nor does it sufficiently address the structural and cultural shifts necessary for transformative change within the field (Gross, 2024).

Implications

Historically, professional experience and empirical research have supported the development and implementation of evidence-based practice (EBP) as a guiding principle in the helping professions (Schwartz & Tilling, 2023). However, applying EBP within the field of social work can present challenges, given the profession's reliance on relational, contextual, and individualized approaches (Schwartz & Tilling, 2023). Despite these complexities, evidence-based practices serve a critical function by bridging the gap between research and practice, ensuring that interventions are both informed by data and responsive to client needs (Schwartz & Tilling, 2023). The findings of this study contribute to this body of knowledge, supporting the assertion that aligning practice with evidence can improve job satisfaction and workplace retention among millennial clinical social workers on a global scale. This practice

modality is built upon three core components: practitioners' professional expertise and individualized experience, the unique circumstances and contextual needs of clients, and the integration of the best available research evidence (Schwartz & Tilling, 2023). The literature acknowledges that presenting empirical research in accessible language and ensuring ease of access can enhance environments in which social work practitioners are better able to integrate both research-based and practice-based knowledge (Schwartz & Tilling, 2023). However, evidence-based practices often originate from a medical model of implementation, which can pose significant challenges when applied within the context of transformative social work practice (Schwartz & Tilling, 2023). This misalignment may limit the adaptability and relevance of EBP in addressing the complex, client-centered, and systemic issues that characterize much of social work (Schwartz & Tilling, 2023).

Social work research incorporates the concept of reflexivity as a core component of its methodological approach (Ide & Beddoe, 2024). Researchers within the social services field recognize that practice is deeply grounded in real-world experiences, shaped by human observation and the interpretation of lived experiences (Ide & Beddoe, 2024). Through reflexive practice, researchers can critically examine their own positionality and assumptions, thereby enhancing the depth and authenticity of the knowledge produced (Ide & Beddoe, 2024). This study centers the lived experiences of millennial clinical social workers, highlighting their personal insights into the attributes that contribute to job satisfaction and workplace retention. Incorporating this level of self-awareness fostered a heightened sense of self in professional social work practice, encouraging practitioners to reflect on their actions, emotions, and critical thinking processes, as well as to understand the impact these factors have on client relationships (Ide & Beddoe, 2024). Reflexivity enables researchers to explore and interpret complex experiences within the practice arena by centering the perspectives of research participants and

presenting these insights in a meaningful and contextually grounded manner (Ide & Beddoe, 2024).

Over time, professional social work research has evolved to reflect a range of diverse methodological approaches, increasingly drawing from and integrating insights across multiple disciplines (Berrett-Abebe et al., 2023). This interdisciplinary evolution has paralleled a shift in the role of clinical social workers, many of whom now practice independently (Berrett-Abebe et al., 2023). The profession remains grounded in a commitment to lifelong learning, as outlined in the NASW Code of Ethics (NASW, 2021). A robust body of literature supports this evolution, particularly research informed by postmodern perspectives that examine subjectivity, power dynamics, identity, and cultural influences within the clinical realm of social work (Berrett-Abebe et al., 2023). Qualitative research approaches significantly contribute to the global body of knowledge in social work by incorporating participants' narratives, thereby re-centering the voices of those most affected by social policies and practices (Berrett-Abebe et al., 2023).

Recommendations for Policy

The application of research outcomes is shaped by a complex array of implicit factors, including contextual considerations, individual competency levels, and political feasibility, highlighting the nuanced nature of translating research into practice (Millar, 2021). The literature supports the notion that stakeholder participation in research enhances the depth of insight gained, often leading to meaningful changes in both practice and policy (Malm et al., 2022). Researchers who identify with the stakeholder group under study are uniquely positioned to offer valuable, context-rich insights that enhance the relevance and applicability of research findings (Malm et al., 2022). Including public stakeholders in research processes is

increasingly recognized as a prudent approach, as their participation can foster broader understanding, shift values, and inform the development or modification of practice and policy frameworks (Malm et al., 2022). However, historically, the involvement of public stakeholders has often been viewed negatively, perceived merely as a procedural formality exercise, rather than being acknowledged for its potential to meaningfully influence policy and practice (Malm et al., 2022).

Social work researchers frequently analyze data to interpret social phenomena and to evaluate the outcomes of policies and interventions (Rose et al., 2024). The conceptual framing of policies serves to define and convey a perceived social problem (Molla & Gale, 2024). This complex and often contested process involves acknowledging structural disadvantages, during which policymakers make value-laden judgments about the nature of the problem and the appropriate course of action (Molla & Gale, 2024). Effective policy should reflect the needs of a diverse and evolving population, avoiding favoritism toward any particular group (Molla & Gale, 2024). Resource allocation and policy responses must be guided by principles of equity, ensuring that efforts are directed toward addressing systemic inequalities and promoting fair outcomes for all (Molla & Gale, 2024).

Policymakers, particularly within helping professions such as social work, are tasked with developing policies intended to transform the lives of targeted client populations and underserved communities (Murphy & Jenkinson, 2021). This research study underscored the importance of reviewing and, where necessary, modifying hiring practices for millennial clinical social workers on a global scale. As this demographic continues to expand, partly due to the retirement of older cohorts and the advancement of others into supervisory or administrative roles, organizations must adapt to evolving workforce dynamics. Many policies within the profession remain bureaucratic in nature and have not kept pace with the

transformative values and practices embraced by contemporary social work practitioners. Aligning hiring and organizational practices with the expectations and needs of millennial clinicians is essential for fostering a sustainable and engaged workforce. The literature supports the assertion that ongoing scrutiny of social work policies is essential, particularly those aimed at advancing social justice, human rights, and systemic social change (NASW, 2021; Samyn et al., 2023).

Social work policy often reflects a complex and dynamic relationship with practitioners, balancing professional responsibilities with the ethical imperative to uphold and advocate for the rights and dignity of clients (NASW, 2021). The literature supports the assertion that senior-level supervisors, such as experienced social workers, can play a critical role in reshaping social policies (Sery & Weiss-Gal, 2022). Drawing on their professional expertise and practice-based knowledge, these leaders are well-positioned to influence policy development and reform in ways that align with emerging trends and evolving community needs (Sery & Weiss-Gal, 2022). At the same time, they must navigate complex budgetary constraints across local, state, and federal levels, making their role in policy transformation both strategic and essential (Sery & Weiss-Gal, 2022).

Recommendations for Practice

Social work practice is unique in its transformative orientation and its ongoing commitment to evolving in response to the changing needs of clients, as well as advancements in treatment and intervention modalities (NASW, 2021). The demographic composition of the social work profession includes highly trained practitioners representing a wide range of ethnic, generational, and gender identities (Raine et al., 2023). Once primarily a face-to-face profession, social work has increasingly embraced technology as a valuable tool to enhance

service delivery (Hilty et al., 2023). The integration of digital platforms has helped ensure continuity of care and has supported the achievement of key goals for both organizations and the clients they serve (Hilty et al., 2023). Many contemporary workplace cultures are composed of three to four generational cohorts: Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z, each bringing unique perspectives and experiences (Kurata et al., 2022). This generational diversity inevitably influences approaches to critical thinking, supervision, communication, and professional values, highlighting the need for adaptive leadership and inclusive workplace strategies that recognize and respect these differences (Kurata et al., 2022).

This research focuses on enhancing job satisfaction among the growing demographic of millennial clinical social work practitioners, with the goal of promoting long-term workplace retention (Shuhaimi et al., 2025). Traditionally, social work careers have been characterized by extended tenures within social service agencies, often accompanied by high levels of stress, burnout, and a diminished sense of belonging, where practitioners may feel more like employees than integral members of an organizational community (Watson & Begun, 2024). The literature supports the assertion that the field must reconsider and revise traditional conceptions of job satisfaction to better reflect the values and expectations of millennial professionals (Ngah et al., 2024). Like many other sectors, the social work profession must acknowledge and respond to millennials' desire for meaningful workplace engagement, autonomy, and organizational inclusion (Ngah et al., 2024). Work environments have evolved significantly over the past two decades, necessitating adaptive strategies as younger generational cohorts increasingly occupy roles across all levels of social service agencies (Kurata et al., 2022).

Social work practice has long been rooted in the principles of social inclusion, freedom of choice, and, in many cases, the capacity to exert control over one's circumstances

(Richardson, 2022). However, there is no singular or universal understanding of the lived experience among social work practitioners (Richardson, 2022). Each clinician brings a unique set of skills, perspectives, and professional identities to their practice, underscoring the diversity within the field and pointing to an ongoing need for future exploration and dialogue around practitioner experience and identity (Richardson, 2022). The overarching goal of this research project was achieved by gaining insight into the lived experiences of millennial clinical social workers, allowing them to articulate the attributes they believe contribute to job satisfaction and workplace retention. Ideally, each organization employing millennial clinical social workers will vary significantly in terms of workplace culture and the extent to which these practitioners are meaningfully included in agency-based initiatives and team-building efforts.

Workplaces seeking to retain millennial clinical social workers must foster an environment where each practitioner feels like a valued contributor to the agency's collective mission. While job satisfaction may vary between individuals, there are several consistent factors that contribute to higher retention. These include offering competitive, market-aligned wages and promoting a healthy work-life balance. It is not enough to simply encourage self-care; organizations must create conditions that actively support it, such as reasonable workloads that do not require frequent overtime to meet basic responsibilities. Additionally, millennial social workers often express a preference for flexibility in their work schedules. As such, agencies may benefit from adopting modified or alternative workweek structures in place of traditional models to better align with the values and expectations of this generational cohort.

Recommendations for Future Work

Further exploration of the lived experiences of millennial clinical social workers could offer valuable insights in the near future, particularly in understanding their growing impact on the global workforce of independent practitioners. Limitations of this study included time constraints and a small sample size (D'souza et al., 2020). However, research bias did not play a significant role in the data analysis or in the identification of themes among participants (Jones et al., 2020). Emphasis is placed on guiding clinical social workers at all levels by identifying tasks and responsibilities that can be addressed through social work theory, policy, and practice (Francis et al., 2020). Embracing an ascending hierarchal methodology for comprehending job satisfaction and workplace retention among millennial clinical social workers provides significant insights into organizational learning and development within social service agencies (Schwartz & Tilling, 2023).

A potential question for further exploration could include: To what extent are millennial clinical social workers satisfied with their roles following the implementation of organizational changes aimed at fostering job satisfaction and workplace retention? Another potential question for further exploration could be: What impact do millennial perspectives on employment have on employee retention within social service organizations? Exploring these inquiries may further validate the unique attributes that millennials bring to the workplace in their pursuit of job satisfaction and long-term retention. Future studies may also consider examining the impact of the rollback of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives and the reduction of remote work opportunities on job satisfaction and workplace retention among millennial clinical social workers. This study offers well-grounded recommendations that serve to address these research questions and contribute to the ongoing development of organizational practices within the social work profession.

Conclusion

The practice of social work has undergone significant transformation in recent years. Millennials now constitute an increasingly prominent demographic within the professional workforce. This generation embodies characteristics such as a strong ambition for success, a preference for leveraging technology to enhance efficiency, and a commitment to inclusivity in the context of their professional roles. Clinical social workers are navigating workplace environments that emphasize the need for greater autonomy, opportunities for professional development, flexible work schedules, and competitive compensation that aligns with current living expenses. Furthermore, millennial clinical social workers seek to achieve a harmonious work-life balance and advocate for periods of rest that extend beyond traditional evening hours and weekends.

Millennial clinical social workers represent a growing demographic within the global mental health workforce. Employee retention within the field of social work has been a persistent challenge, frequently linked to the phenomenon of professional burnout. Social workers typically acknowledge that burnout is a common consequence of consistently delivering therapeutic services; however, they do not often cite it as a determining factor in their decision to remain in their professional roles. Agencies that do not take into account the generational characteristics of the millennial cohort may face difficulties in retaining social workers. It is essential for the field of social work to undertake further considerations that recognize the influence of generational perspectives on job satisfaction and employee retention. The evolving nature of this profession is poised to benefit from insights gained as federal and state policies are adapted in accordance with the support of the current administration.

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Appendix A. Resource Guide

The researcher has submitted the manuscript for publication consideration to the Princeton Journal of Interdisciplinary Research (PJIR). Additionally, the researcher has requested the opportunity to present the findings of this project at a lunch and learn session, which is sponsored by a community hospital and university during the summer of 2025. The presentation will be delivered to community stakeholders representing various generational cohorts and differing levels of licensure within the mental health sector. The themes mentioned above are further emphasized in the digital resource guide provided below.

Supporting Job Satisfaction and Retention Among Millennial Clinical Social Workers

Understanding the Millennial Social Worker.

Social workers from the millennial generation exhibit confidence, adeptness in multitasking, and a robust motivation for achievement. However, they also prioritize the need for flexibility, a sense of purpose, and opportunities for personal and professional growth (Karthikeyan, 2017).

🔗 *The Millennial Mindset in Mental Health Professions*

Workplace Retention Challenges

Leadership struggles to retain millennial employees due to evolving work values. Millennials often prioritize work-life balance, meaningful work, and supportive leadership (Sebastian & Virani, 2021).

🔗 *Millennials at Work: Rethinking Retention Strategies*

Professional Development & Job Satisfaction

Millennials flourish when provided with mentorship, well-defined career trajectories, and opportunities for ongoing education (NASW, 2021).

🔗 *NASW Career Development*

Mental Health of the Mental Health Provider

Self-care is essential for employee retention and overall job satisfaction. Given the prevalence of burnout, prioritizing well-being becomes imperative (Miller & Grise-Owens, 2021).

🔗 *Social Work Self-Care Starter Kit*

Building Supportive Workplaces

Workplaces that are conducive to millennials typically provide flexibility, recognition, an inclusive culture, and advanced technological tools (Levin et al., 2020).

🔗 *Creating a Culture of Belonging for Millennial Professionals*

Final Thoughts

Millennial clinical social workers are transforming the profession. Organizations that recognize and incorporate their values, as well as invest in their professional development, will not only succeed in retaining these individuals but also empower them to shape the future of mental health care.