The Relationship between Burnout, Negative Affectivity and Organizational Citizenship Behavior for Human Services Employees

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Abstract—The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between Burnout, Negative Affectivity, and Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) for social service workers at two agencies serving homeless populations. Thirty two subjects completed surveys. Significant correlations between major variables and subscales were found.

Keywords—Burnout, negative affectivity, organizational citizenship.

I. INTRODUCTION

The most widely known variable in this study is burnout. Maslach and Jackson [1] define burnout as a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who work in helping professions such as social work, counseling and nursing. Emotional exhaustion occurs when workers feel emotionally drained by continuous contact with other people [2]. In the field of social work the nature of the work is heavily contact oriented. Emotional exhaustion sets in when social workers meet with distressed individuals on a daily basis. The constant barrage of crisis situations causes strain and this may lead to emotional exhaustion.

Depersonalization is characterized by negative feelings and cynical attitudes toward the recipients of one’s services or care [2]. Over time social workers may develop a frustration when positive outcomes for their clients are not obtained. Social service workers assist clients that have learned to depend on social systems and frequently lie to survive within these systems. People that come into contact with social service providers are often desperate and may use manipulative tactics to continue receiving services. As frustration with client behavior and service failures grow, social service workers may begin to view their clients not as individuals, but as depersonalized entities.

Given the negative outcomes common in the delivery of social services, a reduced sense of personal accomplishment may be experienced. Reduced personal accomplishment is a tendency to evaluate negatively one’s own work [2]. Success in social work is often determined by the outcomes in the clients’ lives. This measure of success is not merely dependent on the work of the social service provider but success also on the decisions made by the client. However, the provider cannot control the decisions made by the client. Often providers take on the poor choices made by the clients as faults in the service that they have provided to the client.

Burnout has been recognized as a serious concern for employers in the social services and all other industries. Burnout has been linked to negative health effects such as anxiety, depression, decreased self-esteem, cholesterol problems, headaches, diminished psychological well-being, and other health concerns [3]-[7]. Combined with the personal health repercussions associated with burnout are organizational repercussions. Burnout is also linked to intention to turnover, decreased employee commitment and decreased job satisfaction [8]-[10].

The second variable of interest in the study is Negative Affectivity (NA), which is a trait that describes the tendency of an individual to experience a variety of negative emotions across time and situations [11]. Individuals high in negative affectivity are characterized as being easily distressed, agitated, upset, pessimistic, and dissatisfied.

Individuals characterized by high negative affectivity tend to view themselves negatively and dwell upon mistakes, disappointments, threats and shortcomings [12]. Negative affectivity has been examined in an organizational context to determine the relationship between negative affectivity and intention for turnover [11]. Their study was designed to determine the affects of dispositional traits including negative affectivity on turnover intentions of Chinese managers. The results of the study indicated that high negative affectivity scores were related to high turnover intention. Other studies have measured the effect of dispositional traits including negative affectivity on job satisfaction [13]-[18]. Although previous research explored the relationships between negative affectivity, job satisfaction and turnover intention, no research has assessed the relationship between negative affectivity and burnout.

The third variable of interest in the current study is Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB). Organizational Citizenship Behavior was initially defined by Organ [19] as discretionary behavior directed at individuals or at an
organization as a whole, which goes beyond existing role expectations, and benefits the organization and/or is intended to benefit it. Three features of OCB are the center of this definition. One, the behavior is voluntary and not assigned by a job description or role in the organization. Two, the behavior benefits the organization from the organizational perspective [20]. Three, the nature of the behavior is multidimensional.

Other definitions of OCB focus on the target of the behaviors. One such definition splits OCB into two categories: 1) OCBI, or behaviors that immediately benefit particular individuals, and 2) OCBO, or behaviors that benefit the organization as a whole [21]. This definition is more of a definitive examination of the antecedents and levels of targets in the organization [22]. Other researchers have found that OCBO had contextual antecedents (e.g. reward, equity) and OCBI had personal disposition antecedents (e.g. empathy) [22], [23]. These definitions provide more of an insight into the possible motivations that result in the observable behavior.

After an extensive study of available research, [24] defined organizational citizenship behavior by grouping these behaviors into seven different categories. The seven categories are: helping behaviors, sportsmanship, organizational loyalty, organizational compliance, individual initiative, civic virtue, and self-development. For the purposes of the present study, this definition of OCB, which focuses on specific types of behaviors, will be employed. It is hypothesized that social service workers engaging in these behaviors will be more likely to experience burnout due to the higher likelihood that they will exhaust themselves. Specifically, these workers who take on more responsibility than they are asked to take on for a specific job could run the risk of overburdening themselves. This excess workload that is created by individuals that exhibit the behaviors described as OCB characteristics could possibly lead to some relationships between OCB, NA, and Burnout.

II. METHOD

Thirty two social service employees participated in the current study. Participants provided direct service to the homeless population of Snohomish County in Washington State and held positions in teen shelters or worked as community outreach teen advocates. The participants ranged in age from 20 to 62. There were 13 males and 19 females that participated in the study. Education ranged from high school through graduate school, with the majority of the participants holding Associates or Bachelors degrees.

All of the surveys were completed during staff meetings at the organization at which the participants are employed. The participants were given 30 minutes to complete the survey. Each participant was given a candy bar for his or her participation.

The first instrument in the survey was the Maslach Burnout Inventory [1], one of the most widely used measures of burnout [25], [26]. The Maslach Burnout Inventory is designed in a manner that dissects burnout into three subscales based on the definition of burnout noted earlier: Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalization and Personal Accomplishment. There are twenty-two questions on the survey that employs a Likert-type scale. The scale ranges from zero to six. The anchor of zero represents never and the six represents every day. Coefficient alphas for the subscales are: .90 for Emotional Exhaustion, .71 for Personal Accomplishment, and .79 for Depersonalization [27].

The scale used to measure Organizational Citizenship Behavior has twenty seven questions. The survey uses a Likert scale with anchors of one-almost never and seven-almost always. The first thirteen questions are based on a scale developed by Farh and his colleagues [28]. These items were developed in China and are similar to American scales measuring OCB [29]. The items cover three subscales of active positive contributions; Civic Virtue, Altruism, and Conscientiousness. The remaining questions focus on avoiding harmful behaviors with four subscales of Interpersonal Harmony, Protecting Company Resources [28], and based on the American OCB scales, Sportsmanship, and Courtesy [30], [31].

Negative Affectivity was evaluated by a modified version of the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS-X scale). The modification of the scale consisted of a reduction of the amount of items on the scale for the current study, with twenty emotions being measured. The participants rated how they usually feel in regard to the emotions presented. Coefficient alphas for the scale range from .85 to .90 for negative affect [12].

III. RESULTS

According to Maslach [6] burnout is defined by high scores in Emotional Exhaustion and Depersonalization and a low score of Personal Accomplishment. In order to determine the total Burnout score, Emotional Exhaustion and Depersonalization are added and the Personal Accomplishment score is subtracted from the summation of the previous two variables. Descriptive statistics for the variables measured in the current study are indicated in Table I.

Previous research found similar findings for the means and standard deviations of the subjects that were evaluated for the Burnout scale [2] and the OCB scale [22], [23]. Table II presents the correlations for all scales and subscales used in the study. Negative Affectivity, OCB and Burnout all correlate at a significant level with each other. Significant correlations between OCB and Burnout subscales were also found.

A review of all significant correlations is presented in the Discussion section.

IV. DISCUSSION

OCB Scale, Subscales and Negative Affectivity

One of the factors of the Organizational Citizenship scale is Civic Virtue which correlated with Conscientiousness (r=.466), Sportsmanship (r=.628), the OCB total (r=.594) and the Negative Affectivity (r=.512) with a p<.01 (2-tailed). These strong correlations reflect the nature of the relationships between the factors of Organizational Citizenship Behavior scale subscales of Civic Virtue, Conscientiousness, and
Sportsmanship. This relationship could be predicted given past research on the OCB scale and given that these are factors that are presumed to be related to a person’s overall score on the OCB scale. The relationship between Civic Virtue and Negative Affectivity is a strong negative relationship. The higher an individual score on the Civic Virtue variable, the lower their subsequent Negative Affectivity will be. It could be reasoned that a person that is likely to engage contributions related to Civic Virtue such as making constructive suggestions that can improve the operation of the organization [28] is less likely to view the clients in a negative manner as well as their own work.

Altruism, a subscale of the OCB scale was negatively correlated with Protection of Company resources at a level of (r= -.607, p<.01). Altruism is characterized by a willingness to assist coworkers in a variety of ways. A person that exhibits more of the characteristics of Altruism was less likely to exhibit the characteristics of Protection of Company Resources. For example this type of individual would be less likely to conduct personal business while at work and more likely to coordinate and communicate with colleagues [28]. Altruism is considered to be an active contribution whereas, Protection of Company Resources is considered to be an avoidance of harm activity.

Altruism was negatively correlated with the OCB total (r= -.461, p<.01). This is an interesting finding considering the fact that Altruism is a subscale of the OCB. The overall definition of OCB is discretionary individual behavior that is not directly or explicitly recognized by the formalized reward system which, in the aggregate, promotes the effective functioning of the organization [20]. A person who is more willing to assist their co-workers in the instance of the participants of this study are then less likely to score higher on the OCB scale.

Altruism is also positively correlated with the Negative Affectivity total (r=.935, p<.01). A person who rates high on the Negative Affectivity scale would likely be more helpful to other employees. If could be hypothesized that a person who lends a hand more often in turn develops a negative view of his or her work situation and their contributions. A person that has a generally negative attitude is not necessarily going to be unwilling to assist their coworkers. Altruism is correlated with some factors at the p<.05 level as well.

Altruism is negatively correlated with Conscientiousness (r= -.421, p<.05), Harmony (r= -.441, p<.05), Sportsmanship (r= -.422, p<.05), and Civic Virtue (r= -.404, p<.05). The higher the subjects rated on altruism, the lower they rated on the other factors of the OCB scale listed. The more willing an individual is willing to help their colleagues the less likely they will be to comply with company rules when no one is looking (Conscientiousness), and stand up and protect the reputation of the company (Civic Virtue). A person with a high score on Altruism is also more likely to complain about trivial situations (Sportsmanship) and more likely to hurt other peoples feelings (Courtesy).

Conscientiousness was positively correlated the following factors at the p<.01 level; Harmony (r=.64), Protection of Company Resources (r=.59), Courtesy (r=.607), and the Organizational Citizenship Behavior total (r=.938). Conscientiousness behavior is considered to be a mixture of active contributions and avoidance behaviors [28]. An individual high in this factor would likely come to work early, get started right away and take one’s job seriously. To compliment this feature a person high in Conscientiousness would be more likely to avoid placing blame, which is associated with the Harmony feature of the OCB scale. This person high in Conscientiousness would also be more likely to not abuse sick leave (Protecting Company Resources) and more likely to try and avoid creating problems for colleagues (Courtesy).

The final significant correlation for conscientiousness is a negative relationship with the Negative Affectivity total (r= -.453) at the p<.01 level. A person that arrives early and tries to self-study which are the characteristics associated with Conscientiousness is less likely to exhibit the characteristics associated with Negative Affectivity. A person high in Negative Affectivity is likely to view themselves and their clients in a negative manner. A person that rates high in Negative Affectivity is also likely to view their contributions at work in a negative manner as well. The next factor on the correlation matrix is Harmony.

Harmony is positively correlated with Protecting Company Resources (r=.819), Sportsmanship (r=.568), Courtesy (r=.903), and the OCB total (r=.900) at the p<.01 level. The strongest correlation is between Courtesy and Harmony both of which are subscales of the OCB scale. Harmony has significant negative correlation with the Negative Affectivity total (r= -.485, p<.01). Harmony is possibly a strong indicator of a person that is less likely to develop a negative attitude at work. The next factor on the matrix is protecting community resources.

Protecting Community Resources is positively correlated with Sportsmanship (r=.658), Courtesy (r=.826), and the OCB total (r=.893) at a level of p<.01. A person that scores higher on the subscale of Protecting Community Resources is more likely to not conduct personal business on company time [28]. All three of these subscales are strongly correlated. This finding is not surprising given that all of these factors are on the OCB scale and related to the overall behavior.

Sportsmanship is positively correlated with Courtesy (r=.601) and the OCB total (r=.722) at a level of p<.01 level. These individuals will be more likely to avoid hurting others and avoid focusing on the negative. This correlation is a reflection of the OCB scale given that both factors are on the scale.

The OCB scale was negatively correlated with the Negative Affectivity total (r= -.504, p<.01). The OCB scale appears to be a good indicator of pinpointing an individual that would be less likely to display the characteristics of the Negative Affectivity scale. The Negative Affectivity total is positively correlated with the OCB total (r= -.504). Negative Affectivity correlates with all of the subscales of the OCB scale with the exception of Courtesy. According to the results of this study, it could be predicted that someone who scores high on Negative Affectivity would exhibit more of the traits associated with Organizational Citizenship Behavior. The next scale that was evaluated based on correlations was the Burnout scale.
Burnout Total and the Burnout Factors

Altruism was positively correlated with Emotional Exhaustion (r=.837, p<.01), Depersonalization (r=.855, p<.01), and Personal Accomplishment (r=.788, p<.01). A person that scores high on the characteristic of Altruism, it could be reasoned would be a good indicator of an individual that would be less likely to experience the factors related to burnout. All of these positive correlations are significant at the p<.01 level. It is interesting to note that Altruism is positively correlated with Personal Accomplishment which is a factor that is subtracted from the two burnout factors of Depersonalization and Emotional Exhaustion to find the burnout total. Harmony is correlated with the Burnout total (r=.467, p<.01). Emotional exhaustion (r=.455) is the specific aspect of the burnout scale that harmony is negatively correlated with at a level of p<.05.

Protecting Company Resources is positively correlated with Depersonalization (r=.397, p<.05) which is a factor related to burnout. The more likely someone is to not conduct personal affairs at work, the more likely this individual will be to view clients as inhuman and make character judgments based on behavior. Protecting Company Resources is negatively correlated with Emotional Exhaustion (r=.548), the Burnout total (r=.503) and the Negatively Affectivity (r=.570) scale at the p<.01 level. A good indicator of someone that would be less likely to experience burnout may be someone that receives a higher score on Protecting Community Resources.

Sportsmanship correlated with Emotional Exhaustion (r=.410), Depersonalization (r=.364) and the Burnout total (r=.435) at the p<.05 level. Sportsmanship it could be viewed is possibly a good indicator if a person who would be less likely to experience burnout and the factors associated with burnout. The OCB scale was negatively correlated with the Burnout total (r=.459) at the p<.01 level. A negative correlation has also been identified between the OCB scale and Emotional Exhaustion (r=.426, p<.05). This is the factor of the Burnout scale that has the strongest relationship with the OCB scale (r=.426, p<.05).

The Negative Affectivity total is positively correlated with Emotional Exhaustion (r=.810), Depersonalization (r=.889), and Personal Accomplishment (r=.817), and the Burnout total (r=.696) at the p<.01 level. A person that rates high on the Negative Affectivity scale will likely reflect a high amount of the characteristics associated with burnout. The three subscales of burnout are all significantly correlated with one another and with the burnout total. This is a reflection of the structure of the scale and the evident relationship between the factors. Emotional Exhaustion is correlated with Depersonalization at the (r=.905, p<.01), Personal Accomplishment (r=.781, p<.01), and the burnout total (r=.910, p<.01). Depersonalization is correlated with Personal Accomplishment (r=.921, p<.01) and the burnout total (r=.776, p<.01). These correlations are consistent with previous research on the correlations between the factors of burnout [32]. Upon evaluation of the correlations discovered a few assumptions could be made.

V. Discussion

One major limitation of this study was the low sample size of n=32. Studies should be conducted in a manner that reflects at least n=50 or higher. It is difficult to find large populations of social service workers conducting direct service in small nonprofit organizations. Another limitation of this study is that the population surveyed was very specific. These findings are not necessarily applicable to a larger population.

VI. Future Research

Future research using longitudinal data is recommended to see if people who score high on negative affectivity to experience burnout more often and are less likely to perform the actions associated with the OCB scale. Upon conducting a longitudinal study the specific behaviors could be monitored and the scores on the three scales could be evaluated to determine if there is any variance over time.

Research could also be conducted using two workgroups with one control group and one group selected based on high scores on the OCB scale. This study produced high negative correlations for the relationship between the OCB scale and Negative Affectivity. A similar negative correlation was determined between the OCB scale and the Burnout scale. The work group selected based on the high OCB scale should experience less Negative Affectivity and less Burnout.

The factor of the OCB scale that was determined to correlate in a positive manner with both the Burnout and Negative Affectivity totals could be studied individually. The factor discovered to have this relationship was the Altruism. Altruism had significant positive relationships with all of the Burnout subscales of Personal Accomplishment, Depersonalization, and Emotional Exhaustion. Future studies could be conducted to determine what some possible explanations could be for these relationships. The factor of Altruism alone might be a good indicator of a person that would be more likely to experience Negative Affectivity and Burnout.

REFERENCES


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TABLE II
CORRELATIONAL ANALYSIS

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*Significant at the .05 level
**Significant at the .01 level