Resilience and Burnout in Child Protection Social Work

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Overview of Presentation

1. Introduction – Why is this topic important?
2. Methodology of current study
3. Early Indicators of Job Engagement or Burnout
4. Current empirical study Northern Ireland
5. Systematic Literature Review
Why is this topic important? Three Issues

1. Retention and Turnover


“The well-being of children served by the child welfare system are put at risk by the difficulties child welfare agencies experience in recruiting and retaining competent staff as turnover results in staff shortages and high caseloads that impair workers’ abilities to perform critical case management functions.” (Levy 2005)
2. Inexperience in Child Protection Workforce

Due to high levels of workforce turnover, vacancies result in high numbers of graduates taking their first post in child protection Social Work (Healy 2009, NISCC 2009). The level of inexperience in child protection teams is therefore a concerning consequence (Healy 2007, Healy 2009, Weaver 2007, McGowan 2009).
3

What sustains some staff while others “burn out”? Despite this it is acknowledged that some workers are “committed survivors” and appear resilient and able to sustain the pressure of this occupation (Ellett and Ellett 1997, Ellett 2009, Westbrook 2006).

Some of these factors include respite opportunities; management flexibility and supportive supervision; valuing “people” over “bureaucracy”; camaraderie, teamwork and peer support; educating novices – mentoring and support (Westbrook 2006)
Burnout $\rightarrow$ Engagement (Resilience) Continuum

- Peoples psychological relationship to their jobs can be conceptualised as a continuum between burnout and job engagement. Three interrelated dimensions

- Exhaustion $\rightarrow$ Energy
- Cynicism $\rightarrow$ Involvement
- Inefficacy $\rightarrow$ Efficacy

(Maslach & Leiter 2008)
Maslach Burnout Inventory

- Psychometric test designed to establish the subjects self perception of experienced emotional exhaustion (EE), depersonalisation (D) with service users and personal accomplishment (PA).

- A series of 22 questions measure these three dimensions and subjects are asked to report frequency of experienced feelings and thoughts using a Likert scale ranging from (0) Never to (6) Every Day. This scale is measuring the individuals experience on the continuum between burnout and job engagement.
Maslach Burnout Inventory

- The exhaustion component is linked to the psychological strain associated with individual experience of burnout.
- The cynicism is the interpersonal context and refers to an emotional detachment or negative feelings towards service users and other aspects of the job.
- The efficacy dimension is related to the self evaluation dimension of burnout and is experienced when an individual has feelings of incompetence or a lack of achievement in relation to their job.
Organizational Risk Factors
Areas of Work life Scale  (Maslach and Leiter 2008)

1. Workload – job demands exceeding human limits
2. Control – role conflict and exhaustion
3. Reward – Insufficient reward; lack of reciprocal satisfaction
4. Community – Quality of social interaction. Supervisor support and exhaustion. Peer support linked to efficacy. Social support and greater engagement
5. Fairness – perceived equity in decision making
6. Values – motivating connection between worker and workplace. That which originally attracted people to their job. Personal versus organizational goals. Value conflict linked to inefficacy
Area of Work Life Scale
(Maslach and Leiter 2008)

- This scale measures 29 items that have distinct scores for each area of work life. Manageable workload (6), control (3), reward (4), community (5), fairness (6) and values (5).

- The items are worded in terms of perceived congruence or incongruence between self and workplace.
Applied Area of Work Life Scale

This tool defines congruence as a high score which indicates a high degree of “fit” between self and work place. The reverse is true for incongruence. In this instance the score is low which suggests a “misfit” between the person and workplace.
Meaning of the Scores

- Leiter and Maslach 2008, state that job-person incongruity such as these have been found to be directly related to burnout.

- Maslach and Leiter (1997) constructed a model of burnout that gives specific attention to the perceived congruency between the employee and key aspects of their working environment.
Meaning of Scores (continued)

- This model contends that the greater degree of mismatch is directly related to the high potential for burnout.

- The opposite is also found to be true. The higher degree of job-person congruity, the higher chance of job engagement.

- This gives valuable insight into early indicators of job engagement or burnout (Maslach and Leiter 2008)
Wagnild and Young Resilience Scale – RS14 (shortened version)

- 14 item Likert scale measuring personal reflections relating to resilience
- Application to range of populations including adults
- Measures resilience over two broad factor constructs
  - “Attitude to life and self” and
  - “personal competence”
- Theoretical definition – characterised by self reliance; perseverance; meaningfulness; existential aloneness and equanimity
- Not just resilience but “Thriving” (Carver 1998)
- Not just resilience but maintaining compassion and commitment (Cherniss 1980, 1995)
Wagnild 2009

- The validity of the RS was supported with many hypothesised and statistically significant associations with morale, life satisfaction, self esteem, depression and perceived stress.

(Wagnild 2009)
Sir Michael Rutter (2010)

- “Resilience is an interactive concept that can only be studied if one looks at risk or protective factors” (Rutter 2010)
- Rutter draws an example from medicine and the introduction of vaccinations as a method of preventing further disease.
- This suggests that it is the experience of adversity that builds resilience.
- Develop this concept further and one could conclude that child protection social work, within the context of “managed risk” or “protective factors” could be a positive breeding ground for building resilience.
“Snap shot” - Current Northern Ireland Study

Child Protection Social Workers

- 5 Health and Social Care Trusts
- 1 Voluntary Sector Organization
- 162 Social Workers completed questionnaires
- 32 social workers interviewed
- Regional response rate 39%
- Organizational variations
- 140 female, 22 males

Unique Features of Social Work in NI
- AYE
- Post Qualifying Award System
Research Methods

Phase 1
- Quantitative Survey
- N = 162
- Response Rate 39%
- Tools – Demographic Variable Form, Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach 1996), Area of Work Life Scale (Maslach and Leiter 2008) and RS 14 Resilience Scale (Wagnild and Young 1993)

Phase 2
(Those still in post)
- Qualitative Interviews
- N = 18

Phase 3
(“Leavers”)
- Qualitative Interview
- N = 14

Systematic Literature Review
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Systematic Literature Review – Overview of 11 database searches for relevant empirical studies.

“Resilience and Burnout in Child Protection Social Work”
Conclusion

- Important to see “resilience” and “burnout” in the context in which they arise
- Organizational factors need to be examined
- Be mindful of protective and risk factors, organizational and individual
- Develop methods of building personal resilience and highlighting to management organizational factors that impact on either burnout or resilience
- Knowledge and evidence base necessary to formulate changes to existing policy and procedures for recruitment and retention in child protection social work.
References

- Child Protection Workers, Child Abuse and Neglect, Vol 24, No 6, pp 839-848
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Literature Review

References

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- Rumsey, D, (20100, Statistics Essentials for Dummies, Wiley Publishing Inc. USA.