Mental Healthcare Provider Work Orientations and Mental Health Outcomes

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BACKGROUND

- Burnout and stress are common among mental healthcare professionals and are associated with lower quality of life.
- Work orientations, which are defined as the schemas individuals use to conceptualize their relationship with work, have been studied in relation to quality-of-life outcomes in various work populations.
- This relationship has not been specifically studied in mental healthcare worker populations.
- This research aims to characterize work orientation in mental healthcare professionals and investigate its relationship to mental health outcomes and attitudes toward evidence-based practices.

METHODS

- N = 75 mental healthcare workers, predominately White and English speaking, from a children’s hospital in the Mountain West who provide youth psychiatric inpatient or partial hospitalization services.
- Participants completed survey measures of work, openness to evidence-based practices, emotional exhaustion, burnout, and stress.
- Participants strongly identifying with each work orientation were selected via purposive sampling for a qualitative interview.
- 30.7% of this sample endorsed a calling orientation; 45.3% a career orientation; and 5.3% a job orientation, in contrast with other worker populations showing more even endorsement of all three orientations (Wrzesniewski 2003; Wrzesniewski et al. 1997).

RESULTS

- A calling orientation was significantly and positively correlated with professional quality of life (r = .561, p < .001) and openness to evidence-based practices (r = .320, p = .006), and significantly and negatively correlated with emotional exhaustion (r = -.575, p < .001).

Linear Regressions

- Controlling for perceived stress, regressions indicated that stronger agreement with calling orientation remained significantly associated with professional quality of life (B = 5.5, p < .001) and with emotional exhaustion (B = -3.0, p < .001).

CONCLUSIONS

- Findings reveal a significant difference in the proportion of workers endorsing each work orientation as compared to prior research in other populations. Fewer mental healthcare workers endorse a job orientation compared to other populations, while the percentage of mental healthcare workers endorsing a career orientation is higher.
- Findings reveal a significant relationship between calling work orientation, lower levels of negative mental-health outcomes, and higher openness to evidence-based practice.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- Qualitative analysis of interviews conducted with a subset of participants from this study is currently underway. Themes uncovered in these interviews may help to explain relationships between work orientations and other variables of interest.
- 2-month and 4-month follow-up surveys for the same population are scheduled to examine changes in work orientation over time.
- Results may have implications for developing interventions to prevent burnout and reduce stress in mental healthcare workers.