Impact of Workplace Environment on Peer and Non-Peer Mental Health Providers

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Abstract: The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) and Areas of Worklife Survey (AWS) were completed by mental health workers serving four counties in Pennsylvania. Among providers with their own lived experience, referred to as peer-workers, there were significant associations between levels of burnout and both sense of community and sense of control as measured by the community and control subscales of the AWS. These associations were not found among non-peer providers.

Introduction

- Peer providers are mental health workers with diagnosed mental illness who use their personal experience with mental illness to help their peers (Chinman et al. 2017; Mowbray et al. 1996).

- Job-related burnout, a three-dimensional experience involving emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 2016), is found to be common among those in the mental health field due to the nature and gravity of their work (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993).

- Leiter and Maslach (2000) argue that work atmosphere is an important predictor of burnout, and they developed the Areas of Work Life Scale (AWS) to measure congruency between employees' work lives and their personal expectations regarding their work experience (Leiter & Maslach, 2000).

- Firmin, Mao, Bellamy, and Davidson (2018) found that among a sample of 65 peer support specialists, 78 percent had experienced microaggressions within the workplace at least once related to their peer support status, and 38 percent reported experiencing a microaggression at least once a day.

- This project was completed to investigate whether certain aspects of the work environment (particularly those measured by the AWS scales of Community and Values, given possible experiences of workplace microaggressions) may be more closely related to the burnout experience for peer providers compared to their non-peer counterparts.

Method

Seventy-three front-line mental health workers, employed by mental health agencies serving four counties in Pennsylvania, completed a large on-line survey assessing workplace well-being, including rates of burnout (measured by the Maslach Burnout Inventory) and person-job congruency (measured by the AWS). Twenty-six participants identified as peers.

Results

- Independent samples t-tests indicated no significant differences between the peer and non-peer workers on any of the AWS subscales, p >.10.

- The association between sense of community and emotional exhaustion/burnout, r (21) = -.598, p < .01, was significant and moderately strong among the peer providers. The association between community and burnout among the non-peer providers was lower and not statistically significant, r (38) = -.260, p = .115.

- The association between workplace values and burnout was the same for the peer, r (21) = -.261, p = .253, and non-peer, r (39) = -.261, p = .109, providers.

- The association between workplace control and burnout was moderately strong and statistically significant among the peer providers, r (20) = -.622, p = .003, but weak and not statistically significant, r (39) = -.154, p = .350 among the other providers.

Discussion

- The findings of this study suggest that the workplace factors predicting burnout among mental health employees may differ between peer and non-peer workers.

- The relationships peer providers have with their co-workers may have crucial impacts on their personal and professional well-being.
  - The stronger association between disappointing workplace community and burnout may be linked to the increased experience of microaggressions in the workplace.
  - The significant association between control and burnout among peer workers, although not hypothesized, may be similarly associated with the professional relationships peers have with their non-peer co-workers as a result of a tendency for non-peer workers to not trust the judgment of peer-providers.

- Replication of the findings with a larger sample size will be important, as the findings suggest that workplace interventions for reducing burnout may need to be more focused on sense of community and control for peer providers.

References

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