

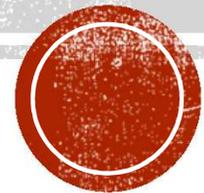
OCCUPATIONAL STRESS AND BURNOUT IN SOCIAL WORKERS WORKING IN BOTH NON- GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS AND FOR THE GOVERNMENT: A COMPARISON OF TWO STUDIES

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INTRODUCTION

Occupational stress and burnout:

- Is widely recognized in human service workers and characterized by:
 - role ambiguities,
 - increasing caseloads,
 - declining wage rates, and
 - limited opportunities for upward mobility
- (Hombrados-Mendieta, & Cosano-Rivas, 2011; King, & Chenoweth, 2002; Lloyd, Travis; Lizano, & Mor Barak, 2015).

Stress-related hazards which could lead to burnout

- job content,
- workload and work pace,
- working hours,
- participation and control,
- career development,
- status and pay,
- role clarity in the organisation,
- interpersonal relationships,
- organisational culture, and
- the home–work interface
- (Leka et al., 2003; MacKay et al., 2004)

Stress factors

- pressure to complete tasks within a certain time,
- heavy workload,
- dealing with challenging and difficult clients,
- feeling poorly compensated for work,
- unclear roles and job expectations,
- long hours, and
- minimal support from supervisors and co-workers
- (Arrington, 2008)



ABOUT THIS PRESENTATION

- A comparison of two studies conducted in Cyprus regarding occupational stress and burnout amongst:
 - social workers in Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) (Study #1 by Dr Katsounari) and
 - social workers in the Social Welfare Services of the Government of Cyprus (Study #2 by Dr Parlalis and Dr Christodoulou)



STUDY #1

It explored occupational stress among social workers employed in non-governmental services

It aimed to assemble a snapshot of factors affecting work performance as well as possible causes of work burnout.

It focuses on organizational characteristics as well as personal factors, which can have an impact on social workers' work performance.



It is supported that social workers employed in voluntary organizations are more vulnerable in experiencing higher levels of burnout compared with social workers employed in governmental services (Coffey et al., 2004; Craiovan, 2015; Dillenburger, 2004; Dyser & Quine, 1998; Koski, 2013).

In particular, employees at non-governmental organizations have been associated with high occupational stress and exhaustion due to the fact that they come in contact with people whose suffering seems most of the times unmanageable, as these patients present serious disabilities or cumulated health and social issues (Coffey et al., 2004; Craiovan, 2015; Dillenburger, 2004; Koski, 2013).



STUDY #2

It explored occupational stress and burnout among social workers employed in the Social Welfare Services of the Government of Cyprus

It aimed to identify the main stress factors in the workplace that, according to the social workers themselves, could eventually lead to burnout.

The researchers focused on identifying risk factors and proposing methods that could minimise the stress factors in the workplace and thereby prevent or reduce staff burn-out.

In addition, actions that individuals themselves could take were explored.



Smith (2003) argued that social workers may have higher levels of stress because they have a greater awareness of stress than other professionals do who might not be aware of how stressed their work environment makes them; other reasons they may experience work stress and burnout concern conflicting roles, status, function, and contexts (Lloyd et al., 2002).



Study #1

- **Twelve (12) social workers** employed in these services were interviewed (convenience sample).
- These social workers were **employed in different services** (mentally ill, special needs population, elderly, child protection and welfare field, domestic violence field, disability, cancer patients, community social work).
- **Semi-structured interviews** were utilized, comprising of eleven open-ended questions around their perceptions and experience around burnout and factors that influence their job performance.
- Data was analyzed with the use of **thematic analysis** based on the guidelines outlined by Braun and Clarke (2013).

Study #2

- **Four one-day workshops** were organised – two in Nicosia (January 2016) and two in Limassol (June 2016). The workshops lasted six hours each.
- **36 participants** in each of the first two workshops and 24 in the following ones.
- **Part A (theory)** consisted of a two-hour lecture on staff burnout theory and work stress.
- **Part B (practical)** the group was divided into two smaller groups (focus groups) and participated in various interactive and experiential exercises.
- Content analysis was used to analyse the data.

METHODOLOGY



Study #1

1. Organisational demands
2. Role ambiguity and conflict
3. Interactions in the workplace - lack of understanding and cooperation with superiors/colleagues
4. Collaboration with clients and other services
5. Personal expectations
6. Public perceptions of social work and social workers - low recognition of the profession

Study #2

1. Organisational issues
2. Workload
3. Job-related issues
4. Complex responsibilities
5. Personal issues
6. Professional relations

FINDINGS



STUDY #1 - FINDINGS

No.	Categories	Description	Consequences
1.	Organisational demands	<p>Workload: dealing with complex cases especially with children, and at the same time, being obliged to take up tasks that otherwise should be performed by other staff.</p> <p>Overtime: neither recognized nor valued. It reduces their efficiency and affects their personal and social life.</p> <p>Ethical dilemmas: when no clear guidelines and protocols, and inadequate education and training of the social worker</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tremendous pressure • Additional burden • Anger • Frustration • Disappointment • Intense stress • Emotional conflict • Exhaustion
2.	Role ambiguity and conflict	<p>Lack of clarity concerning their duties, responsibilities and the expectations of their role</p> <p>Assigned roles outside their scope of their knowledge or training</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conflict and tension with superiors



STUDY #1 - FINDINGS

No.	Categories	Description	Consequences
3.	Interactions in the workplace - lack of understanding and cooperation with superiors /colleagues	Problematic interactions with colleagues Positive communication with superiors	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Extreme tension• Confusion• Anxiety and uncertainty• Decreased efficiency and productivity • Positive feedback• Acknowledgment of job requirements and difficulties• Support when confronted with dilemmas and difficulties



STUDY #1 - FINDINGS

No.	Categories	Description	Consequences
4.	Collaboration with clients and other services	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Inaccessibility• Indifference• Ineffective collaboration and miscommunication with Government departments and other agencies• Inadequate knowledge and lack of training in dealing with moral dilemmas• Lack of supervision by their superiors	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Stress• Anxiety• Anger
5.	Personal expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Search for a meaningful life experience and passion to help people in need and make a difference in their society.• Role ambiguity and lack of training can become serious obstacles for professional advancement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Uncertainty• Insecurity



STUDY #1 - FINDINGS

No.	Categories	Description	Consequences
6.	Public perceptions of social work and social workers - low recognition of the profession	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The social work profession is not adequately recognised in Cyprus and is considered inferior to other professions.• Lack of protocols and legislative framework related to social worker's duties.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Misunderstandings• Misconceptions• Sense of uncertainty and insecurity regarding skills, knowledge, value and confidence



STUDY #2 - FINDINGS

No.	Categories	Description	Consequences
1.	Organisational issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Old-fashioned and ambiguous procedures of the organisation • Bureaucratic system • Lack of appropriate means • Lack of professional vision • The administration does not inform workers of its strategic vision • Not included in the administration's policy and strategy formation • Unclear directions from the administration and unclear roles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insecurity • Frustration • Neglected by administration • Insecurity
2.	Workload	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heavy workload due to the lack of staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stress • Pressure by the administration



STUDY #2 - FINDINGS

No.	Categories	Description	Consequences
3.	Job related issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lack of external supervision, support, or guidance• Employee evaluation is based on non-objective criteria• Difficult working hours, change of national laws and lack of autonomy• Difficulty organising time due to lack of superiors' administrative skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Supervision reduces burnout and increases the sense of fulfilment in the workplace• Stress• Great barrier for work



STUDY #2 - FINDINGS

No.	Categories	Description	Consequences
4.	Complex responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complicated work and undertaking many tasks simultaneously. • Unexpected circumstances complicate the daily programme and new responsibilities were continuously added. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low self-confidence • Lack of trust to administration
5.	Personal issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work not recognised or respected 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low self-confidence • Low self-respect • Feelings of rejection
6.	Professional relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not ideal working environment • Poor relations among colleagues • Lack of proper communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of trust and confidence among colleagues





- **Both studies indicated the following:**
 - Whether social workers are employed in the voluntary or governmental sector in Cyprus has no difference in the fact that they are all often confronted with difficult situations in the workplace, which have an impact on their work experience and can lead to occupational stress and burnout.
 - Having to deal with a heavy workload, difficult working hours and meeting the requirements of multiple challenging cases can have an important impact on professional performance.
 - The role ambiguity, role conflict and unclear directions from superiors and organisations increase conflict and tension with superiors and other colleagues and add a tremendous pressure on the social workers.

- **Both studies indicated the following:**
 - Lack of supervision, support and guidance decrease the sense of fulfillment in the workplace and increase the possibilities for burnout.
 - Inadequate knowledge, lack of training in dealing with moral dilemmas and lack of superiors' administrative skills can increase stress at work and chances of burnout.
 - Poor relations and lack of proper communication among colleagues lead to extreme tension, confusion, anxiety and uncertainty, decreased efficiency and productivity, lack of trust and confidence.



Each study has also highlighted a couple of stress factors which lead to burnout and differ in respect to the working sector which social workers are employed in (voluntary and government sector)

Study #1 (NGOs)

- The social work profession is not adequately recognised in Cyprus and is considered inferior to other professions.
- Lack of protocols and legislative framework related to social worker's duties.

Study #2 (Government)

- Old-fashioned and ambiguous procedures of the organisation
- Bureaucratic system
- Lack of appropriate means
- Lack of professional vision
- The administration does not inform workers of its strategic vision
- Not included in the administration's policy and strategy formation

DISCUSSION

