

Variables Associated with Burnout and Turnover Intentions Among Case Managers in Community Mental Health

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Statement of the Research Problem

An estimated 2.8 million adults in the United States suffer from psychiatric illness that has persisted or is likely to persist over time (National Institute of Mental Health, 1989). Many of these adults who suffer from mental illness are served by the community mental health system. Although case management has emerged as an important service delivery model in community mental health, there exists a very high incidence of staff turnover. Champney (1989) reports an annual turnover rate of 40% to 60% among case managers who work in community mental health centers in the state of Ohio. Fee (1991) has found an annual turnover rate among case managers of about 30% at one large inner-city community mental health center, at which he is the director.

There are a number of serious consequences of high turnover among case managers. As Fee (1991) suggests, it takes about six months for many severely mentally disabled persons to form a meaningful and trusting relationship with a case manager. Because this bonding between a severely mentally disabled client and his or her case manager is so critical, Fee maintains that the frequent turnover of case managers is disastrous in terms of effectiveness of service. Fee (1991) also asserts that dissolving this relationship can sometimes have serious results for a person who is severely mentally disabled, the most extreme result being when the severely mentally disabled person deals with the loss by committing suicide. It is also expensive to train new case managers, costly \$6,000 to \$7,000, including time to post a position, interview prospective case managers, place newspaper advertisements, and provide orientation and training to the new employee (Fee, 1991).

Intentions to quit one's job has been found by many to be the best predictor of actual turnover (Dallessio, Silverman & Shuck, 1986; Michaels & Spector, 1982; Steel & Ovalle, 1984). In addition, turnover intentions have been found to provide useful information about one's job situation even among those who intend to quit but remain on the job (Bowen, 1982; Thompson & Perpening, 1983). As such, turnover intentions now play a significant role in turnover research (Hinsz & Nelson, 1990). Burnout is a serious problem in the human services. It is the negative response to working with people over time, and manifests itself in emotional exhaustion, lack of personal accomplishment, and depersonalization of clients (Maslach, 1982).

Research Background

The research question addressed by this investigation was "What variables help to explain turnover intentions of case managers?" A causal model of turnover intentions among case managers who work in community mental health was developed. It was hypothesized that role strain, felt stress, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and burnout contribute significantly to turnover intentions. There are a number of causal relationships in this model of

turnover intentions among case managers, which suggest that there are both direct as well as indirect effects of variables on other variables in the model. Role strain, as a particular stressor, was proposed to directly affect felt stress. Felt stress was proposed to directly affect both organizational commitment and job satisfaction negatively, and to affect burnout in a positive direction. In addition, according to the model, felt stress affects burnout indirectly through both job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Finally, the model suggests that both job satisfaction and organizational commitment have a direct effect on turnover intentions, as well as an indirect effect on turnover intentions through burnout.

This model of turnover intentions among case managers tested the following hypotheses:

1. The greater the role strain, the greater the felt stress.
2. The greater the felt stress, the lower the job satisfaction.
3. The greater the felt stress, the lower the organizational commitment.
4. The greater the felt stress, the greater the burnout.
5. The greater the job satisfaction, the lower the burnout.
6. The greater the organizational commitment, the lower the burnout.
7. The greater the job satisfaction the lower the turnover intentions.
8. The greater the organization commitment, the lower the turnover intentions.
9. The greater the burnout, the greater the turnover intentions.

Methodology

This research consists of a sample survey design in which a self-administered questionnaire was given to a sample of case managers in order to test the model of turnover intentions. This researcher met with the case managers as a group at each of 14 sites in two counties, briefly explained the nature of the research, and remained while they completed the questionnaire. Copies of the questionnaire, with addressed, stamped envelopes, were left for those case managers who were not present, and telephone calls were made to those case managers who did not return the instrument, urging them to do so.

Results

A total of 170 case managers from the two counties completed the questionnaire. This number represents approximately 92 per cent of the case managers working at the community mental health centers in the two counties at the time, who had been at their jobs more than two weeks. All nine of the research hypotheses were found to be significant at $p < .001$. A number of these correlations were moderately high, with correlations of $-.6595$ between job satisfaction and turnover intentions, $.6344$ between felt stress and burnout, $-.6125$ between job satisfaction and burnout, and $-.5400$ between felt stress and job satisfaction. The lowest of these correlations was that of $-.2723$ between felt stress and organizational commitment. Path analysis was utilized to examine the relationship between the variables in the causal model. A number of ordinary least square regression equations were computed to obtain path estimates, which are

standardized regression coefficients, or betas, after it was determined that the necessary assumptions had been met. A regression analysis incorporating all six of the variables in the model found an R^2 of .458 for the entire model. This compares favorably with other models of turnover intentions (Parasuraman, 1989; Peters, Bhagat, & O'Connor, 1981).

Regression analyses were performed on the other dependent variables in the model. A significant path of .4923 was found between role strain and felt stress ($p < .001$), when role strain is the only variable regressed on felt stress. A significant path of .4784 was found between felt stress and burnout. Other significant paths were found between felt stress and job satisfaction (-.3983), and between job satisfaction and burnout (-.2624). All of these other path coefficients were also found significant at $p < .001$. However, the path coefficients for the four other paths proposed by the model were not found to be significant at $p < .05$, including all three of the paths involving organizational commitment. These are the paths between felt stress and organizational commitment, organizational commitment and burnout, and organizational commitment and turnover intentions. In addition, the path between burnout and turnover intentions was not significant. Therefore, of the nine paths proposed by the model, only five were found to be significant at $p < .05$, when regressed on the variables as proposed by the model.

An examination found two additional paths to be significant. A path of -.2481 was found between role strain and job satisfaction ($p = .001$), and a path of -.4319 was found between role strain and organizational commitment ($p < .001$). Thus, it appears that role strain is more important than initially considered, by impacting indirectly on turnover intentions through two additional variables in the model, as well as significantly affecting stress, which has an indirect effect on turnover intention. In addition, the only path found to be significant at it relates to organizational commitment is that from role strain. Two additional path analyses were conducted, one excluding organizational commitment from the model, and one excluding burnout from the model, as these were the variables for which not significant paths were found in the original model.

With burnout excluded from the model, an adjusted R^2 of .450 was found for the model, which is very close to the R^2 of .458 that is explained by the full model. However, only the path to turnover intentions found to be significant at $p < .05$ was still job satisfaction, which was significant at $p < .001$. An examination of the residuals in this model revealed that they were significantly and highly correlated, an indication that an important variable was missing from the model. When organizational commitment was excluded from the model, an adjusted R^2 of .451 was found, which is also very close to the .458 variance explained by the full model. This model yielded a relatively weak but significant path of .1676 between burnout and turnover intentions ($p < .05$). A significant path of .5678 was found between job satisfaction and turnover intentions in this model ($p < .001$). Thus, when organizational commitment is excluded from the model and the other four variables are regressed on turnover intentions, burnout is found to have a significant direct effect on turnover intentions.

An examination of the residuals in the model with turnover intentions as the dependent variable, that excluded organizational commitment, found the residuals to be not correlated, an indication that an important variable is not missing. Therefore, this revised model of turnover intentions was substituted for the initial model of turnover intentions that had initially been proposed. Other regression analyses were conducted on the dependent variables in this revised model that excluded organizational commitment. When role strain was regressed on felt stress, a significant beta of .4923 was found ($p < .001$) and the R^2 was .2378.

Role strain also found to have a significant path of $-.2482$ ($p = .001$) when regressed on job satisfaction, as was felt stress which had a path of $-.4166$ ($p < .001$). When both role strain and felt stress were regressed on job satisfaction, a R^2 of $.3294$ was found. When role strain, felt stress and job satisfaction were regressed on burnout, 50.19% of the variance was explained, and two additional significant paths were found. A path of $-.3571$ was found between job satisfaction and burnout, and a path of $.3976$ between felt stress and burnout. Both of these paths are significant at $p < .001$. An important finding of this research is the impact of role strain on a number of variables in the model, including its indirect effect on turnover intentions. Role strain was found to significantly affect a number of variables in the model, over that which was initially hypothesized, as it had an indirect effect, as well as a direct effect, on several variables in the model. The results of the path analysis revealed a significant path between role strain and job satisfaction.

Role strain was found to affect burnout indirectly through three different paths. Role strain was found to have a total of five indirect paths to turnover intentions for a total effect on $.3175$. This research also found job satisfaction to be of considerable importance. It was found to have the largest direct path to turnover intentions, as a well as an indirect effect through burnout. Job satisfaction was also found to be affected both directly and indirectly by other variables in the model. Job satisfaction is an old construct that has long been recognized as important to any consideration of turnover behavior, and more recently, to an understanding of turnover intentions as well.

Both burnout and organizational commitment are more recent conceptualizations that have been recognized to contribute to both turnover intentions and actual turnover behavior. This research confirmed the importance of job satisfaction, even when both of these two newer constructs are included in a model of turnover intentions. For the purposes of this research, job satisfaction was operationalized to consist of overall job satisfaction, satisfaction with pay, and satisfaction with promotional opportunities. In addition to this quantitative analysis, the responses to four opened-ended questions included in the questionnaire for case managers were examined. The issues identified by case managers were consistent with the findings of the path analysis, and help to elaborate on some of these findings. Case managers raised the issue of salary quite often, and many identified it as what they liked the least about their job.

Another issue that was addressed a number of times concerns the lack of respect, regard, and concern for case managers that they perceive. Another issue often identified by case managers relates to unrealistic role demands. One respondent noted that case managers are expected to be "miracle workers." Many case managers also identified dissatisfaction with promotional opportunities. This is largely because the experience of working as a case manager does not apply toward the work experience needed to obtain licensing as an independent social worker, which is one of several possible licenses needed to become a case management supervisor, a logical promotion for a case manager.

The case managers in this sample identified a number of other common dissatisfactions and concerns. Among these were excessive paperwork, lack of resources in the community, especially housing, with which to link up their clients, and large caseload size. In spite of these difficulties, case managers reported that they like working with their clients and helping them to improve their lives. Many of the case managers took issue with case management as a system and philosophy. They thought the way in which case management is practiced tends to foster clients' dependence on them.

Utility for Social Work Practice

The findings of the research have a number of important implications for social work practice. Because role strain was found to have a relatively large total effect on turnover intentions, these findings seem to suggest that reducing role strain might result in reduced turnover intentions. This might be accomplished by clarifying case manager role expectations and lessening the conflicting roles that comprise the job of case manager. A considerable number of case managers addressed the issue that they did not believe that they were recognized, appreciated, or valued. This is an important issue, because while case management has emerged as an important and widespread service delivery model, case managers themselves have not been similarly accorded a very high status. It is difficult to advocate on behalf of their clients, as is part of their job, if they are not highly regarded by other human service professionals.

These research findings emphasize the need to further examine the case management system, in order to address the ways in which to reduce turnover intentions and actual turnover of case managers, as well as to more effectively serve clients.

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