Title: The Role of Mindfulness, Resilience, and Coping in Mitigating Against Burnout and Turnover in Direct Support Staff Working with Problem Behavior

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Introduction: There is a high rate of turnover in direct support professionals (DSPs) working with adults with developmental disabilities (DD). Studies examining turnover in residential, vocational, and in-home caregivers showed an annual turnover rate of 48.1 to 53.6% (M = 50%) between 1998 and 2003 (Ejaz, Bukach, Dawson, Gitter, & Judge, 2013; US Department of Health and Human Services, 2006), between 50% and 75% in non-state community service agencies, and between 20 and 25% in state-operated organizations (Larson, Hewitt, Lakin, & Felce, 2004). One highly studied risk factor for turnover is burnout, which has been associated with experiencing problem behavior from clients, caregiver demographic variables such as age and gender (Mutkins, Brown, & Thorsteinnson, 2011; Smyth, Healy, & Lydon, 2015; Vassos & Nankervis, 2012), lack of support in the workplace (Devereux, Hastings, Noone, Firth, & Totsika, 2009; Mutkins et al., 2011; Vassos & Nankervis, 2012), negative emotional responses to work demands (Mills & Rose, 2011; Mutkins et al., 2011; Smyth et al., 2015; Vassos & Nankervis, 2012), and negative coping styles (Hastings & Brown, 2002a; Mitchell & Hastings, 2001). There is a need for further research on protective factors that mitigate against burnout and subsequent turnover in DSPs (Smyth et al., 2015), such as positive coping styles (Devereux et al., 2009), resilience, and the role of mindfulness, a coping style that has targeted in interventions for caregivers of people with DD to improve how they respond to problem behavior. The current study investigated the relationships between hypothesized protective factors, burnout severity, and retention in DSPs supporting aggressive adults with DD.

Method: Participants were 97 DSPs who worked with an aggressive adult with DD. Inclusion criteria included experiencing aggression at least once per week from an adult they had been working with for at least three months. Data were collected through interviews and surveys at Time 1 on participants' self-reported resilience, mindfulness, burnout, and coping styles. Caregivers' burnout and job status were assessed three months later, at Time 2. Variables were measured using the Brief Resilience Scale, Kentucky Inventory of Mindfulness Skills, and Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI). For analyses, caregivers were divided into two groups: retained (n = 64) versus turned over (n = 33). Time 1 measures were entered into regression models to determine the extent to which they may mitigated against the three burnout subscales comprising the MBI (Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalization, and Personal Accomplishment) as well as turnover at study Time 2.

Results: In retained caregivers, mindfulness skills were moderately inversely correlated with emotional exhaustion ($r = -.45, p < .01$) and depersonalization ($r = -.45, p < .01$) at Time 2, and positively moderately correlated with personal accomplishment ($r = .37, p < .01$). Resilience was negatively correlated with emotional exhaustion ($r = -.44, p < .01$), depersonalization ($r = -.37, p < .01$), and moderately correlated with mindfulness average scores ($r = .43, p < .01$). Finally, use of emotional support was moderately positively correlated with emotional exhaustion ($r = .40, p < .01$), depersonalization ($r = .40, p < .01$), and negatively moderately correlated with resilience ($r = -.31, p < .01$). In turned over caregivers, Personal Accomplishment was moderately correlated with Time 1 mindfulness scores ($r = .43, p < .05$). Neither Emotional Exhaustion nor Depersonalization at Time 2 were significantly correlated with baseline scores on protective factors. In retained caregivers, mindfulness emerged as a negative predictor and use of emotional support emerged as a positive predictor of Emotional Exhaustion in a statistically significant model, $R^2 = .38$, $F(3,49) = 10.14, p < .001$. Mindfulness also emerged as the only significant negative predictor of depersonalization in a significant model, $R^2 = .22$, $F(3,49) = 4.51, p < .01$. Examining these same relationships through binary logistic regressions treating retention as the dependent variable, a non-significant model emerged, $\chi^2(3) = 4.40, p = .22$. None of the included variables emerged as significant predictors of outcome.

Discussion: This study shows the importance of mindfulness as a process variable to mitigate against burnout in DSPs serving adults with DD who engage in aggression. They support the continued exploration of mindfulness-based interventions as a method for supporting DSPs of people with DD.
References/Citations:


