

Critical Article Review: Supervisors and Stress

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A review of the Regehr, Chau, Bruce, and Phillip, 2002 study examining managers and supervisors responses to stressors while working for a child welfare agency.

Operational Description of Article

Regehr et al., 2002 formulated a study to examine managers / supervisor responses to various stressors involved in working for a child welfare agency. Their research addresses the following questions;

1. What is the nature of the stressors experienced by supervisors and managers following a process of child welfare reform?
2. What is the impact of the stressors on managers and supervisor?
3. How do the stresses encountered by managers and supervisors compare with those of front line workers?

Out of these questions the researchers hypothesis that the stress level for managers / supervisors is higher than those labeled as front line workers. They also hypothesis managers / supervisors rates of giving up instead of resilience are greater than in recorded history.

The study goes into a fairly in-depth lit review in regards to previous studies on managers / supervisors stressors and affects. The study itself uses a probability sampling method in which every member of Children's Aid Society of Toronto is given a questionnaire, with approximately 33% response rate. This is the quantitative aspect of the research project. The questionnaire included several measures of "exposure to traumatic events, levels of social support, and levels of distress" (p. 22). The researchers also, engaged in a non-probability sampling via quota for the qualitative facet of the project. They chose eight members the managers / supervisors and eight members of the front line workers to participate in open ended interviews. The interviews included "questions about stressors encountered on the job, the effects of the stress on participants, organizational supports and strategies for dealing with stress" (p. 23).

The methods of investigating the specific research questions with the canvasser's hypothesis in mind seems appropriate. The research gave opportunity to the entire population that the researchers were attempting to look at. The sam-

ple size of respondents is large enough to be generalized too much of the organization. The canvasser's state that "it is important to underscore that this is not intended to be reflective of all managers and supervisors in all child welfare organizations" (p. 33). The amount of respondents selected for interview is an acceptable amount for qualitative research. The questions gave a greater context to the needs of the agency, and specific ways in which the individuals coped with the stressors.

The report's quantitative component has well established measurement apparatuses. This leads to a stronger internal validity. Internal validity deals with if the relationship to the cause and affect are causal. In the report, do the stated stressors cause higher stress levels for the managers / supervisors? It seems in that the corollary aspects are fairly strong in describing these affects. The quantitative data being paired with the qualitative data seems to further prove the causal relationship of stressors to stress. Some of the threats to internal validity are as follows; history, maturation, testing, instrumentation changes, statistical regression, selection biases, ambiguity about the direction of causal influence.

The article looks at the history of the stressor and stress relationship. This seems to be consistent. The survey measures a specific point in time and the responder's attitudes, which could be a possible confound. The tests implemented are established and respected. These tests are not described as changing throughout the research process. The statistics do not show a regression. Each of the points that respondents are chosen, it is by random selection. It seems natural that the stressors cause the stress, and not ambiguous.

The discourse shows both the dependent and independent variables. The independent variables are the stresses that are described by the clients. The dependent variables are the stressors that the respondents describe as affecting the stresses. For the qualitative aspect of the research, they seem to be reliable and valid. The questions that are used point to specific answers about the dependent variables, making them valid. They are asked to all of the used respondents making them reliable.

The authors of the study are specific, as mentioned previously, to how generalizable this study is. They state that it is generalizable to the members of the given agency. Some

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of the reasons that they state that it is not generalizable is because of some of the specific circumstances of the agency. They describe the agency as a "large organization in a major city that has been subject to two high profile coroner's inquests" (p. 33). The sample size and number of respondents supports greater generalizability.

Discussion on Articles Conclusions

The article is well put together. The authors support their conclusions with the data at multiple levels. As with any study, there are weakness and limitations. One weakness that is not described in the discourse has to do with funding. The very agency that is being examined is reported to have generously supported the research. Of the named researchers, one is the assistant director and the other is the organizations coordinator of research, which is another confound. This study seems to be a little too close to home for comfort and would

have been helpful to have an outside third-party evaluation. The research method was also not anonymous and, although not stated, it is possible that the respondents felt forced into participating.

The research material seems to be needed for practice. Although, the material does not deal with a specific population for social workers to have be engaging in some sort of client interaction. The implications of the stress levels for works in child welfare, and lays the foundation for further research looking into how to reduce the various aspects.

References

- Regehr, C., Chau, S., Bruce, L., & Phillip, H. (2002). An exploration of supervisor's and manager's responses to child welfare reform. *Administration in Social Work*, 26(3), 17-36.