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Job strain, compassion fatigue and burnout among Canadian nurses: Examination of the moderator role of emotional intelligence

Stephanie Maillet
Université de Moncton, Canada

Nurses often suffer from high levels of job strain, partly due to work environment characteristics and conditions in which they work. To this end, the tridimensional model of job strain (Karasek & Theorell 1990) posits that the combination of psychological distress, lack of decisional latitude and lack of social support can lead to a variety of psychological problems, such as burnout and compassion fatigue. Burnout can be defined as a psychological syndrome involving chronic emotional and interpersonal stressors that individuals' experience at work and their subsequent responses to their tasks, organizations, coworkers, clients, and themselves (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993; Maslach, 2003; Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Maslach & Leiter, 2008). Maslach and Jackson (1981) argued that burnout is a multidimensional construct consisting of three separate, albeit related, dimensions: emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and personal efficacy. It has been well documented that burnout may progress into a condition known as compassion fatigue (Bell et al. 2003), which can be conceptualized as the emotional, moral and physical distress, which occurs as a consequence of caring and bearing witness to the suffering of others (Crowe 2016). It manifests itself through a gradual erosion of empathy, optimism and compassion (Zawieja 2014). However, it is possible that individual dispositions, such as emotional intelligence, may moderate the relationship between occupational stress, burnout and compassion fatigue. Emotional intelligence is a cross-section of interrelated emotional and social competencies, skills and facilitators that determine how effectively we understand and express ourselves, understand others, relate with them, and cope with daily demands (Bar-On 1997). However, few research studies have examined the role of emotional intelligence in the relationship between the previous variables. The aim of this research study is therefore to fill this empirical gap by examining the moderator role of emotional intelligence in the relationship between occupational stress, burnout and compassion fatigue. More specifically, we aim to answer the following research questions: 1) what are the direct and indirect effects of occupational stress dimensions (job demands, psychological reseources and social support) on both burnout dimensions (exhaustion, cynicism and personal efficacy) and compassion fatigue ? 2) what is the moderator role of emotional intelligence in the relationships between occupational stress dimensions (job demands, psychological reseources and social support) and burnout dimensions (exhaustion, cynicism, and personal efficacy). In order to answer these two research questions, a cross-sectional survey was carried out on a convenience sample of 1375 nurses across Canada, between September and December 2016. Structural equation modeling in Mplus was used to validate the study questionnaires using confirmatory factor analysis and to test the hypothesized model. Results revealed that the model was an acceptable fit for the data: $\chi^2(6) = 93.746$, p = .000; CFI = .975; TLI = .896; RMSEA = .103; SRMR = .020. The results also revealed that job strain acted as a predictor of all three components of job burnout, which was, in turn, associated with higher levels of compassion fatigue. However, emotional intelligence did not significantly moderate the effect of job strain on job burnout dimensions, but it was found to be significantly related to lower levels of compassion fatigue. To conclude, the practical and theoretical implications are discussed.The results of this study will add to the literature on the impact emotional intelligence may have on occupational stress, burnout, and compassion fatigue among the nursing population.

Biography

Dr. Stephanie Maillet has completed her doctorate degree from the Université de Sherbrooke in Quebec (Canada). She is currently an associate professor and vice-director at the Université de Moncton in New-Brunswick (Canada). Dr. Maillet's research interests involve organizational, groupal and individual factors that promote professional well-being among the nursing population. More specifically, Stephanie has studied psychological work climate, occupational stress, job satisfaction, emotional intelligence, turnover intentions, burnout, and compassion fatigue among nurses.

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