Correctional Counselor Burnout: Evidence for Increased Burnout in Restrictive Environments

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Discussion Outline

- My Background
- Culture of Correctional Mental Health
- Study Overview
  - Rational/Research Questions
  - Method
  - Participants
  - Results/Conclusions
- Lessons Learned
- Future Research Goals
- Questions
Personal Background

- Four years experience working as a counselor in the Texas Prison system
  - Two years working in a re-entry and rehabilitation program
    - Group counseling
    - Therapeutic community living
  - Two years working in maximum security unit
    - Crisis intervention
    - Medication compliance
Unique Obstacles to Correctional Counseling

- Behavioral interventions based on punishment are not effective in promoting long term change (Amos, 2004)
- Staff can often be resistant to interventions that appear to be outside of the criminological (punishment) model
- Staff may interpret other interventions as “accommodating” inmates or reinforcing negative behavior
Inmate Perspective of Segregation

“Some individuals think that... you know, he shouldn’t have anything. Give him some bread and water and put him in a cage somewhere. And that’s fine too but don’t expect the guy to be a nice guy and smile and say thank you for the bread and water every time you bring it.” – Death row inmate Troy Kell (Abraham & Levin, 2002)
Administrative Segregation

- “These offenders leave their cells, for the most part, only for showers and limited recreation.” (p.5)

- Limits of confidentiality challenges ethical obligations

- Risk of mental illness and self harm can be exacerbated
The Importance of Counselor Burnout

- American Counseling Association (2014) cites in section A.4.a
  - “Counselors act to avoid harming clients, trainees, and research participants and to minimize or to remedy unavoidable or unanticipated harm.” (ACA, p. 4).
Rational for the Study

- 49% of Inmates in U.S. state prisons incarcerated for a violent offense have been identified with a mental health problem (U.S. Department of Justice, 2006)

- Suicides in U.S. state prisons account for 5.5 percent of all inmate deaths compared to .0177 for males in the U.S. not incarcerated (U.S. Department of Justice 2013; World Health Organization, 2009)
Rational for Study (cont)

- Limited research in the area of prison counselor burnout (Garland & McCarty, 2006)

- No research exists on prison counselor burnout using the Counselor Burnout Inventory (CBI; Lee et al., 2007)
Research Questions

- Does the Counselor Burnout Inventory posses construct validity with correctional counselors?
- Are there differences in Burnout based on group membership (e.g., ethnicity, gender, experience, or type of facility)?
- Do correctional counselors report increased burnout scores compared to counselors who work in other settings?
Counselor Burnout Inventory

- Occupation Specific Burnout Measure
- Five Factor Structure
  - Exhaustion
  - Incompetence
  - Negative Work Environment
  - Deterioration in Personal Life
  - Devaluing Client
Method

- **Survey Design**
  1. Confirmatory Factor Analysis- Theory driven technique used to verify the structure of an observed set of variables (items on the CBI)
  2. Descriptive comparison of factors within the MBI-HSS and CBI (will test the convergent and discriminate validity of the CBI)
  3. ANOVA and t-test statistics used to measure group differences in burnout
  4. Means comparison of correctional counselor CBI scores with counselors in other settings
Measures

- CBI
  - Exhaustion
  - Incompetence
  - Negative Work Environment
  - Deterioration in Personal Life
  - Devaluing Client
- MBI-HSS
  - Emotional Exhaustion
  - Depersonalization
  - Personal Accomplishment
T-Test and ANOVA Power Calculations

- Independent samples $t$-test examining mean differences in burnout based on gender had enough power to test for a large and medium effect.
- ANOVA testing mean differences in burnout based on years of experience as a prison counselor and type of prison had enough power for a 4 group comparison to test for a large ($f=.40$) effect.
CFA Sample size considerations

- CFA sample size requirements depend on communality (the amount of variance in the variable explained by the factor) and overdetermination of the factors (high number of indicators per factor)
Results

- Participants
- Factorial Validity
- Convergent and Discriminate Validity
- Scale Reliability
- Correctional counselor group differences
- Comparisons with previous research
Participants

The sample (n=86) included:

- participants who worked as counselors or other mental health professionals (i.e., social workers & psychologists)
- Participants worked in prisons located in two states in the southwest U.S.

Demographics

- Female (57%)
- Caucasian (80.2%)
- Licensed Professional Counselors (64%)
Factorial Validity

- Measures of the subscales (i.e., the items on the CBI) were consistent with the theoretical basis used in the Confirmatory Factor Analysis
  - All factor loadings on the CBI were above .6 with the exception of items 3 (λ=.59) and 8 (λ=.21) on the Negative Work Environment subscale
  - Factor loadings on the MBI all exceeded .6 with the exception of one item (λ=.48) on the Depersonalization scale and three items (λ=.44; λ=.51 and λ=.40) on the Personal Accomplishment scale
Model Fit

- Model fit results for the CBI
  - Chi Square ($\chi^2 = 276.96; \text{df} = 160; p < .001$)
  - Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = .95
  - Tucker Lewis Index (TLI) = .95
  - Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = .09

- Model fit results for the MBI
  - Chi Square ($\chi^2 = 424.724; \text{df} = 206; p < .001$)
  - Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = .93
  - Tucker Lewis Index (TLI) = .92
  - Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = .11
Construct Validity

- **Convergent Validity**
  - *Exhaustion* subscale of the CBI and Emotional Exhaustion subscale of the MBI reported a correlation coefficient of \( r = .76 \)
  - *Incompetence* subscale of the CBI and Emotional Exhaustion subscale of the MBI reported correlation coefficient \( r = .52 \)

- **Discriminant Validity**
  - *Exhaustion* and *Incompetence* subscales of the CBI reported correlation coefficients of \( r = - .43 \) with the Personal Accomplishment subscale of the MBI
Scale Reliability

- Individual reliability of the CBI subscales provided evidence that the items within each scale were consistent with each other.
  - Counselor Burnout Inventory
    - Exhaustion ($\alpha = .84$)
    - Incompetence ($\alpha = .76$)
    - Negative work Environment ($\alpha = .71$)
    - Deterioration in Personal Life ($\alpha = .79$)
    - Devaluing Client ($\alpha = .90$)
Within Group Differences

- No statistically significant group differences were found between groups based on gender, experience as a prison counselor or type of prison (i.e., minimum, medium, maximum security or inpatient facility).

- Cohen’s $d = .26$ (small effect size) for difference in Deterioration in Personal Life based on gender. Eta Squared = .013 (small effect size) for differences in Exhaustion based on years of experience as a prison counselor.
Within Group Differences (cont)

• Non significant mean differences showed that counselors who worked in maximum security prisons scored higher on all burnout subscales except for Deterioration in Personal Life

• Non significant mean differences showed that counselors who work in inpatient correctional settings scored lower on all burnout subscales except for the Devaluing Client subscale

• Lack of significance possibly due to small sample size
Comparisons with other groups of Counselors

- Several previous studies that utilized the CBI were used for comparison with the current study.
- Groups ranged from Korean, Japanese and US counselors working with a wide range of clients.
- A total of seven different groups were used as comparison groups for the current study.
- Sample sizes ranged from to 86 to 379.
Comparison Highlights

- Mean subscale scores were higher among correctional counselors on the *Exhaustion* and *Negative Work Environment* subscales.
- Mean subscale score were lowest among correctional counselors on the *Deterioration in Personal Life* subscale.
- Japanese and Korean Counselors scored highest on the *Incompetence* subscale; Korean Counselors scored highest on the *Devaluing Client* subscale.
Study Conclusions

- Study provides evidence of construct validity with the Counselor Burnout Inventory and prison counselors.
- Significant within group differences among correctional counselors in levels of burnout were not found.
- Study provides evidence that correctional counselors experience higher negative feelings about their work environment but appear less likely to connect negative feelings about work to their personal life.
Study Implications

- The CBI has practical utility in measuring negative feelings related to work specific to counseling.
- Correctional counselors who work in the most restrictive environments (i.e., maximum security) may be most likely to experience negative feelings related competency and the therapeutic relationship compared to other correctional counselors.
Study Implications (cont)

- Correctional counselors may be better in separating work related stresses from their personal life.
- Cultural factors may play a significant role in how counselors experience feelings related to competency.
Lessons Learned

- Addressing obstacles to participant recruitment
  - New strategies (i.e., developing long term relationships with state and federal systems) are needed in order to produce viable research in correctional mental health in general
- Profession needs to advocate more for correctional counselors through promoting and supporting research
Additional Research Goals

- Larger scale replication study on correctional counselor burnout
- Qualitative research with correctional counselor supervisors to develop “best practice” standards and guidelines
- Examine relationships between correctional counselor burnout and client outcomes
- Use research to advocate for the increased need of mental health counseling in correctional environments
Questions?
References


References (cont)


