

European Research Institute in Social Work (ERIS)

Research / dissertation project	
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Subject / title of the project ‘OCCUPATIONAL WELL-BEING OF SOCIAL WORKERS WHO WORK WITH FAMILIES AND CHILDREN’	
Scientific importance <p>Social workers who are working with families and children in problematic situations such as child welfare are at high risk to suffer from various distresses, which can lead to serious physical and mental diseases. Those distresses are caused by the special work conditions and by the nature of social work with traumatised and deprived clients (Borritz et al. 2006, Collins 2008). Within a few months, child welfare workers see more suffering and misery than anyone might see in a life time (Van Hook & Rothenberg 2009). In consequence, high turnover rates and absenteeism of staff represents a difficult situation in many human service organisations, resulting in negative service outcomes and higher costs. Further, service providers and their clients are depended on the social workers' well-being in several aspects.</p> <p>This doctoral thesis focuses on identifying and analysing the mechanisms of processes that create and maintain occupational well-being, as well as on identifying the influencing factors. Occupational well-being is seen as a complex multi-dimensional construct, which has not yet been sufficiently researched. One section of the analysis concerns the helping process, which is the common element in child welfare services. It is seen as the main factor in the development of distress and reduced well-being, caused by the emotionally demanding worker-client interaction. Another section of the analysis concerns the interaction between employees and their organisation, and this analysis aims to explore the impact of organisational demands and support on well-being. Therefore, the worker-client relationship, and the interaction of the organisation with their employees are the key processes studied in the research. The contributory factors will be explored in greater detail and described more precisely in order to increase our understanding of their impact on the well-being dimensions, and to learn more about their impact on both individuals and organisations. Furthermore, the research focuses on the interaction between personal and organisational factors, to provide a better comprehension of its effects on employees' occupational well-being and the impact on organisational processes.</p>	
Practical relevance <p>The aim of the research is to identify and explain the processes and factors that influence the occupational well-being of social service employees. These variables enable the process to be defined and explained in order to develop and maintain occupational well-being, and they facilitate the identification of hindering factors. This research also provides the variables for measuring occupational well-being. As a result, the theoretical multi-dimensional concept of occupational well-being will be more detailed in its structure and constitution, and will contribute to a deeper understanding of occupational well-being in the social work profession. Empirical data on the level of occupational well-being among Finnish social service employees will also be provided. Linking this data with the theoretical concept will enable the identification of factors that explain the variation of occupational well-being among respondents, and allow conclusions to be drawn concerning the improvement of working</p>	

conditions, work processes and outcomes. Finally, the findings will be used to identify, both theoretically and empirically, the factors that may promote or hinder protecting and hindering factors of occupational well-being.

Main thesis

Main Research Questions

- What are the relevant processes and factors influencing occupational well-being?
- What are the organisational characteristics of social workers' occupational well-being?
- What are the individual characteristics of social workers' occupational well-being?

Research methodology

Structural equation modelling (SEM) is the main statistical technique to be used in the research for testing and estimating the relationships among variables in occupational well-being. SEM is a set of statistical procedures that can be used to test theoretically specified models of relationships between observed variables and unobserved latent variables. Those variables will be identified by analysing the key concepts of distress and well-being. In addition, path analysis, as a causal model for understanding relationships between variables, will be applied to define the correlations and interdependencies of the variables, which impact occupational well-being. Generally, the theoretical part of the research focuses on the positive description of occupational well-being instead of the negative outcomes of work-related distress. Moreover, the factors identified as contributing to the occupational well-being of social service employees are used to build a body of variables, which express the relevant processes. Based on that, an instrument to measure occupational well-being will be created. This questionnaire will be sent to Finnish child welfare workers via e-mail to ensure a fast and cost neutral process of data gathering, and the necessary actions obtaining the permission to survey employees are taken into consideration. The data analysis will be carried out according to quantitative data analysis methods and descriptive statistic functions using SPSS or equivalent data analysis software. Regression analysis and a confirmatory factor analysis technique will be applied in this stage to define the relationships among the variables revealing the occupational well-being of social workers who are working with families and children.

Key words

social work, occupational well-being, child welfare services, structural equation modelling, quantitative measurement

Most relevant literature

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Key finding (if already existing)