An Analytical Study of Occupational Stress and Coping of Trained Social Workers in Madhya Pradesh

Abstract

Human services concerned with human beings embedded in their multi-faceted world of complications of relationships are mentally and emotionally challenging. As found in the literature, work-related feelings of anxiety in social workers lead to depression and burnout. Moreover there is variability in stress of social workers due to their diversified roles. In the Indian context with regard to the problems faced by them, very few studies have been conducted. There are, however, few studies indicating gaps at the training level and also pointing towards unsatisfactory support and guidance in connection with job placements.

The stress and coping among trained social workers (TSWs) is a complex and multi-faceted phenomenon which demands logical investigation into the individual differences based on various stress and coping theories. Such a situation calls forth an in-depth study of the issues. In this background, researcher was hopeful of identifying sources of stress in the profession. Secondly, I hoped to find out the occupational stress and the ways of coping among trained social workers. All this was to be analysed as per the individual differences on the line of socio-demographics and occupational factors. Further, this study was an attempt to bring out the possible suggestions from TSWs at educational and organisational levels.

To identify stress levels and coping, researcher used the Occupational Stress Index developed by Srivastava and Singh (1984) and the, Coping Checklist developed by Rao et al. (1988). Other than these two scales, one structured questionnaire was used as well.

The main stressors prevalent among the majority of TSWs were fewer opportunities for career advancements, lack of resources and opportunities to refine their job skills, job insecurity, dearth of contingent rewards, expectation to work for long hours/on holidays, wide range of the work task, uncertainty, low salary, ideological differences and conflicts between demands of job and home.

The study also identifies violence at the work place. TSWs from the NGOs reported physical (causing bodily harms) and verbal abuse from their clients (beneficiaries). TSWs from corporate setting received more of oral threats. TSWs in the academic never faced any kind of physical or oral abuse in their job tenure from their clients.
Almost 50 per cent TSWs were moderately stressed in their occupation. Only 20 per cent of the total TSWs were highly stressed. Prominent ways of coping used by trained social worker were problem-focused coping, seeking social support and ways of accepting/redefining the stressful situation. However, it was found that there was a decrease in overall occupational stress by the use of problem-focused coping and by positive ways of distraction.

The female TSWs in particular perceived more number of stressors and faced more stress than male TSWs. They perceive fewer opportunities for career advancement and promotion, as well as conflicts between demands of job and home as major stressors. They were found to use more emotion-focused ways of coping and seeking more social support than male TSWs.

When one looks across the work settings, TSWs from NGOs and academic fields were found to be more stressed than TSWs from corporate/industries. For TSWs from these two work settings, job insecurity was one of the major stressors. TSWs from academic setting were also concerned about low salaries, whereas those working in corporate setting were less stressed. However, they perceived less decision-making power, bureaucratic work environment and inter-personal conflicts with colleagues as major stressors.

With increasing work experience, TSWs were found to use more problem-focused coping and positive ways of distraction. There was a decrease in overall occupational stress with the increasing work experience.

The identification of stressors and analysis of individual-centric variations during the process of stress and coping pertaining to the socio-demographic and occupational aspects would help to have target-based intervention plan for occupational stress management at the workplace. Suggestions by the TSWs at training and organisational levels would assist/guide management to prepare plans for prospective professional social workers.