

PSYCHOLOGICAL CAPITAL AMONG PROFESSIONALS IN PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT

Introduction

Professionals who handle children with autism face exceptional challenges as they come across hyperactivity, self-injurious behavior, compulsive behavior and frequent meltdowns. The present research was designed to determine the relationship between Psychological Capital, Mental Health and Burnout among Professionals working in Autism Centers in Punjab Pakistan. Furthermore, it also aimed to investigate the role of mental health as a mediator between psychological capital and burnout.

Methods

The correlational research design and purposive sampling technique was used to collect data. Participants of the study were Autism Therapist N=450, including Behavior Therapist (n=180), Speech Therapist (n=140) and Special Educationist (n=130) from 51 Autism centers in Punjab, Pakistan. The research instruments included Psychological Capital Questionnaire, General Health Questionnaire and Teacher Burnout Inventory. Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analyses was conducted for predicting demographic characteristics, psychological capital and mental health burnout of professionals working with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Results

The results of this ongoing study showed that a significant positive relationship exists between Psychological Capital and Mental Health. Professionals who have unsatisfactory working environment suffer more from emotional exhaustion and cynicism. The value of R^2 explained 15 % variance in burnout of professionals. It also revealed that the unsatisfactory working environment of Autism therapist predicted the burnout.

Conclusion

Social support in the work environment for trainees is the key predictor of minimizing burnout and job satisfaction. A flexible environment and definite set of working hours is needed for positive well-being of the professionals working with autistic children.

Keywords: Mental health, burnout, professionals, psychology.

INTRODUCTION

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder which is visible in children of ages between 2.5 to 3 years. It influences a child's verbal, intellectual and social parts of life. In Pakistan a third world country according to 2017 Census, 55 per cent of the population has been diagnosed with Autism and there are at least 1,700,000 children with ASD in Pakistan (1). The ratio of ASD is about 1 in 500 in, Pakistan (2).

Those professionals who handle ASD face exceptional challenges as they come across self-injurious behavior, compulsive behavior and frequent meltdowns (3). Managing behaviors is mentally exhaustive, which results in burnout (4), anxiety, depression (5) and other psychological or physical health complications among the professionals and decreases their psychological well-being (6, 7). Burnout seems to be common among professionals who have no change in workplace environment or people (8). They follow a structured and scientifically designed program for the completion of the task which is time allotted. Evidence indicates that professionals who have healthy psychological capital had no risk of poor mental health and were able to escape burnout (3), (22). Those individuals with poor psychological capital when worked with ASD children faced psychological distress. Interventions are needed for therapists who face burnout (9). Reducing job burnout an important factor for increasing the psychological capital which can positively enhance mental health (10).

The model of Psychological Capital (PsyCap) as per Luthans (11) has four states hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism. In the framework of aforementioned circumstances, the current study was designed to determine the relationship between Psychological Capital, Mental Health and Burnout among Professionals working with Autism.

Specifically the present study aims to explore the immediate impact of psychological capital on mental health in Professionals working with Autism in Pakistan. The study explores if Mental Health is a significant mediator in the relationship between Psychological Capital and Burnout. The present study proposes the following hypotheses:

- There is a positive relationship between psychological capital and mental health among professionals of autism resource center.
- There is a negative relationship between mental health and burnout among professionals of autism resource center.
- There is a negative relationship between psychological capital and burnout among professionals of autism resource center.
- Psychological capital and mental health are likely to predict burnout in professionals of autism resource center.
- Mental health is likely to mediate relationship between psychological capital and burnout.

Methods

Research Design

For the present study a Correlational Research Design was used. Purposive sampling was used and participants included child psychologists, behavior therapists, speech therapists and special educationists from different autism centers in Punjab, Pakistan. There are 51 Autism Centers in Lahore. The inclusion criteria had participants dealing with children diagnosed with ASD with minimum 12 months experience, and a minimum age of 25 years or more. The exclusion criteria was professionals doing multiple jobs, who had any physical disability or had experienced a significant stressor/ death of a closed one within past 6 months, or providing care, special attention to their own child diagnosed with any mental disorder.

Demographics

The study comprised of different demographic variables which included age, education, marital status, family system, nature of job, monthly income, job experience, duty shift, duty hours, critical incident, stress appraisal and number of children.

Instruments

Three instruments were used in the study, Psychological Capital Questionnaire (PCQ) which (11) consists of four subscales including Hope, Optimism, Efficacy, and Resilience. General Health Questionnaire (GHQ) had 28 items (12) and Teacher Burnout Scale (TBS) (13) was utilized to assess instructor burnout.

Procedure

The Ethics Review Committee (ERC) of Riphah University, Lahore, Pakistan approved the study. Permission was taken from different concerned authorities and from authors of scales. A total of 51 autism institutes were invited for participating in the study. Informed written consent was taken from the participants. Participants who consented to participate were briefed about the nature of the study. Participants were assured that their identity will not be disclosed to anyone. Confidentiality was maintained in this research.

Results

Participants of the study were Autism Therapist N=450, including Speech Therapist (n=140), Behavior Therapist (n=180) and Special Educationist (n=130) from 51 Autism centers. Total 500 questionnaires were distributed, 450 questionnaires were returned filled properly. Total period of data collection was 9 months. The response rate was 85%.

First section is the psychometric characteristics of data, second section includes the descriptive analyses of demographics and the third section includes the inferential statistics which provides information about the tested hypotheses in the current study.

Demographics Description

Table 1

Percentages of Severity level of Autism, Type of Setting for Session, Working Environment, Relationship with Colleagues of Professionals (N=450)

Variables	%
Severity level of Autism	
Mild	(3.3 %)
Moderate	(70.7 %)
Severe	(26.0%)
Type of setting for session	
One to One	(66.0%)
Group sessions	(34.0%)
Working environment	
Highly unsatisfactory	(.7%)
Un-satisfactory	(6.0%)
Moderate	(39.3%)
Satisfactory	(46.7%)
Highly Satisfactory	(7.3%)
Relationship with colleagues	
Highly unsatisfactory	(3.3%)
Un-satisfactory	(12.0%)
Moderate	(46.0%)
Satisfactory	(34.0%)
Highly satisfactory	(5.3%)

Note: (N=450), % = percentage

Table 2: Correlation matrix for Psychological Capital, Mental Health, Burnout and demographics characteristics of professionals

Sr. #	Variables	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	M	SD
I	WE Unsatisfactory	-	-.8		-.6*	.09*	.08*	.08*	.08	.43
II	Relationship		-		.60	-.20**	-.8	.20*	.07	.52
III	Mild ASD			-		-.28**	.50*	-.10**	.03	.8
IV	CR Unsatisfactory				-		-.23.	-.08**	.12	.02
V	Total PCQ							-.53**	207.00	8.4
VI	Total GHQ							.19	99.10	4.1
VII	Total TBS								144.55	.02

Note: -WE- Working Environment-ASD-Autism Spectrum Disorder-CR-colleague Relationship-PCQ-Psychological Capital Questionnaire-GHQ-General Health Care-TBS-Teacher Burnout Scale * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Results of table 2 show that unsatisfactory working environment has significant correlation with burnout. Ultimately, the unsatisfactory relationship with colleagues has significant negative correlation with mental health and burnout. Thus, it is highlighted that the burnout is more likely among Autism therapist when they have unsatisfied working environment. The professionals who deal with severity level of Autism Spectrum Disorder have highly significant correlation with psychological capital. Results of the present study also show that disability of spectrum is not a major cause of burnout; the proper environment and training of therapist are prerequisite for eliminating the burnout among ASD therapist. The Psychological Capital has highly significant relationship with mental health in this study.

Table 3: Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analyses Predicting on Demographic Characteristics, Psychological Capital and Mental health on Burnout of Professionals working with ASD (N=450)

		Burnout of Professionals that working with ASD	
<u>Predictors</u>		<u>ΔR^2</u>	<u>B</u>
Step 1			
Working environment of Professionals		.32**	.48**
Step 2			
Psychological Capital			
Step 3		.33**	.36**
Mental Health			
Total R^2	(0.15)	.26	.57

Note. $p < .001$ ** $\Delta R^2 = r^2$ Adjusted r square, B = Standardized Coefficient, total $R^2 = r$ square

a. Dependent variable, Burnout

b. Predictor variable in this model, working environment of professionals, Psychological capital and Mental Health.

Table 3 indicates that in Step 1 in regression analysis the working environment of professionals is the significant predictor of burnout. The professionals who have unsatisfactory working environment are the predictors of emotional exhaustion. The value of R^2 explained 32 % variance in burnout of professionals.

Step 2 in showed that the low psychological capital of professionals is the significant predictor of burnout. The value of R^2 explained 33 % variance in burnout of professionals.

Step 3 shows that mental health of professionals is the significant predictor of burnout. The psychological distress leads to burnout in professionals of ASD. The value of R^2 explained 26 % variance in burnout of professionals.

DISCUSSION

The present study is the extension of the pilot project and aimed to determine the relationship between Psychological Capital, Mental Health and Burnout among the Professionals dealing Autism.

The statistics of the current study indicate that High proportion of professionals (68.0%) conducted face to face sessions and majority professionals dealt with moderate level of ASD (74.7%). Evidence shows (14) that professionals who handled these kinds of disabilities, need special setup in which individual session can be conducted. Positive workplace reflects adequate emotional feelings of professionals towards their job (15).

The current study also searched that (16) sufficient salary, low workload and less number of family members play an important role in psychological well being (3). Marital status is a source of social support which prevents and reduces the individual responses to stress and can predict PWB (17, 18). Present study found that staff found in Autism institutes was less in quantity thus increasing emotional exhaustion as confirmed by literature (19) (20). Current study also suggested that if job mismatch the personality traits of therapist that would be on risk for burnout, this is corroborated by existing evidence (9). Positive relationship was found between psychological capital and mental health of ASD professionals indicating that ASD therapist in Pakistan possesses higher level of PsyCap resources. One such possible explanation

for high scores on PsyCap and psychological well-being can be spiritual/religious beliefs (21). The professionals who had unsatisfactory working environment were more prone to burnout and had low psychological capital. The unsatisfied working environment predicts the burnout among professionals.

This study brought forth the psychological problems (burnout) experienced by Mental Health Professionals working in Autism Resource Centre in Pakistan. It was also highlighted the importance of Psychological Capital and the role of mental health in influencing burnout of professionals which is not flourished yet as Pakistan is a 3rd world country and has less resources. Ultimately it gives insight in arranging workshops of low cost level and teach professional the ways to handle negativity, harassment, stress of family and how to carry on social life for grooming. A definite set of 6-8 working hours should be defined by policy makers so that burnout could be managed further as economics is falling and no outside help is available at home.

Strengths and Limitation

A meager literature exists on professionals' mental health and burnout working with Autism in Pakistan (22), a pilot study was conducted previously. It is perceived in current study that the relationship with colleagues is the factor that decrease the burnout. Those therapists reporting high work demands and unsatisfactory working environment are more prone to emotional exhaustion. The Autism therapists have to work on one to one session, the environmental changes and individuality of ASD child leads to stress. The autism staff comprised in Pakistan was majority of the female. This study showed that managing challenging behaviors increased psychological capital. Thus, all new professionals should be trained to manage stressful behaviors first so that burnout could be reduced. Future research should focus on interventions which are most useful for reducing burnout designed with low budget.

CONCLUSION

Social support in the work environment is key predictor of minimizing burnout and job satisfaction. A flexible environment and definite set of working hours is needed in every institute for positive well-being of the professionals.

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Disclosure

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Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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