

How Helpers Help Themselves: Burnout and Coping Strategies among Rehabilitation Therapists

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Background

In December of 2018, I began volunteering at the Rehabilitation Institute of Oregon (RIO) in Legacy Good Samaritan Medical Center. RIO is an inpatient rehabilitation facility that offers comprehensive care with the goal that patients regain independence. After noticing the incredible empathy, time, and physicality that the employees commit to the patients, I was interested in learning more about the negative effects of the intensive care that correspond with working in a helping profession, such as the development of burnout.

Many researchers categorize burnout by dividing it into two dimensions: exhaustion and disengagement (Reis et al., 2015). In current literature, a wide array of data exists that focuses on burnout among rehabilitation therapists, illustrating that many therapists experience great psychological stress and fatigue (Gupta et al., 2012). This study sought to analyze feelings of employees specific to RIO in regard to their experiences with burnout and prevention strategies in order to improve work environments and create change.

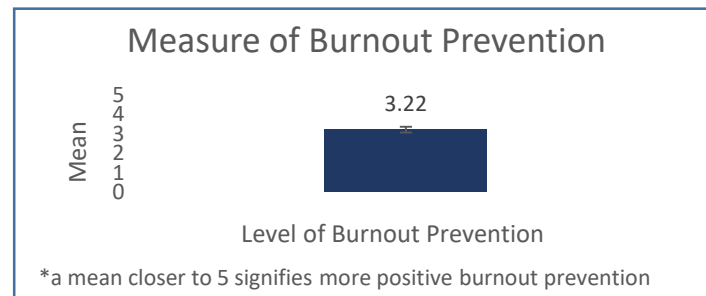
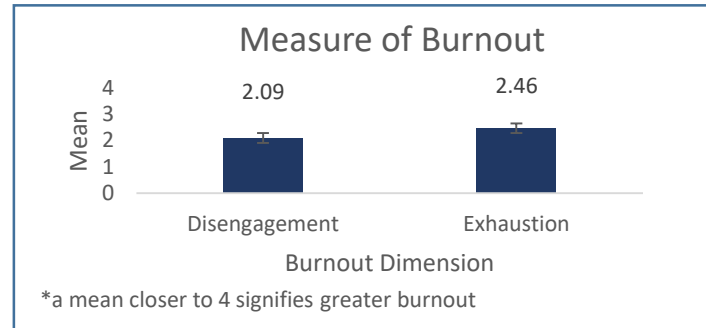
Methods

Data were collected through the use of a forty-five-item survey with open and close-ended questions focused on the participants' demographics, job experience, job satisfaction, prevention strategies, and future implementation. The Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (OLBI) was used to calculate burnout. A nonproprietary inventory was utilized to analyze prevention strategies and effectiveness. The sample consisted of nine RIO employees.

Project Questions:

- What are the reported rates of burnout among RIO employees?
- How do knowledge of and time invested in self-care strategies correlate with feelings of burnout?
- What initiatives can RIO take in order to better support their employees?

Results



Q: What initiatives can RIO take to better support your emotional, social, and mental wellbeing?

"Flexible schedules [...] Allowing us a way to spend more time with our families."

"Have some noon in-services about stress management with practice sessions."

"sudden/long increases in patient census without adequate staff is the most draining part"

Discussion / Conclusion

The data suggest that RIO employees' experiences with burnout appear to be fairly average and moderate, closely resembling burnout rates of employees in a wide variety of work environments. As oppose to predictions, a weak correlation was found between the burnout dimensions and prevention strategies, suggesting that a prominent relationship between the two variables may not exist.

Survey responses to RIO's future implementation may provide additional insight into the employees' experiences and correlative burnout scores. For instance, many participants mentioned how various schedules, work hours, or staff inadequacies cause their work to feel more difficult and draining, likely influencing their experience with exhaustion and overall burnout score.

Future research on the topic could focus on achieving a larger sample size in order to have a more diverse group that better represents RIO as a whole. Additionally, one could complete research regarding burnout and prevention scores among RIO employees before and after attending a stress management program.

Through my volunteer experience and research, I have gained a greater appreciation for the work done in a rehabilitative therapy setting, considering the immense care, commitment, and empathy that employees devote to their patients.

References

- Reis, D., Xanthopoulos, D., & Tsaousis, I. (2015). *Measuring job and academic burnout with the oldenburg burnout inventory (OLBI): Factorial invariance across samples and countries* doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.burn.2014.11.001>
- Gupta, S., Paterson, M. L., Lysaght, R. M., & Von Zweck, C. M. (2012). *Experiences of Burnout and Coping Strategies Utilized by Occupational Therapists* Canadian Assn of Occupational Therapists. doi:[10.2182/cjot.2012.79.2.4](https://doi.org/10.2182/cjot.2012.79.2.4)