
THE LEADERSHIP CHALLENGE

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THE MOST TRUSTED SOURCE ON BECOMING A BETTER LEADER

TITLE Burnout of Direct Care Staff and Leadership Practices in Residential Treatment Centers for Children and Adolescents

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OBJECTIVE The purpose of this study was to determine whether or not a relationship exists between burnout and leadership.

METHODOLOGY

This sample consisted of 142 direct care staff working in three residential treatment centers located in southeastern Virginia (90% response rate). Eighty-nine percent were females, and their mean age was 35 years, the majority were in committed relationships (63%), 55% had at least one child, 54% indicated that religion was very or extremely important in their lives. About one-third of all respondents had been on the current job for one year or less, 85% had bachelor's degrees, 48% felt that school had prepared them well for their jobs and 54% said that training provided by their organization prepared them "little" for their job (35% said "well"). Respondents completed the Leadership Practices Inventory (Observer), the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach & Jackson, 1996), and a three-item Intent-of-Leave scale. Cronbach's alpha reliability scores in this study for the five practices were .88 for Modeling and Encouraging, .89 for Enabling and Challenging, and .91 for Inspiring.

KEY FINDINGS

Enabling and Modeling were the two most frequently used leadership practices reported by the direct care staff about their leaders, followed by Encouraging, then Inspiring and Challenging. The lack of Modeling and Encouraging by their leaders was significantly associated with Emotional Exhaustion on the part of the staff. Low levels of Personal Achievement were all significantly associated with experiencing low levels of Modeling, Enabling and Encouraging. Personal Achievement and Inspiring were inversely related, meaning that the higher level of personal achievement experienced, the lower employees rated their leader's ability to Inspire. No significant relationships were found between the Depersonalization burnout scale and the five leadership practices.

The author speculates about the unexpected inverse relationship found between Personal Achievement and Inspire a Shared Vision:

It appears that if an employee feels that he or she makes a positive impact on his or her clients, then it does not matter if he or she subscribes to the vision of the leader or department. These findings may also suggest that although employees may not be clear on what the leader's vision is, they still feel good about what they accomplish at work at the end of the day. The possibility remains, however, that if employees have high personal accomplishment, their leaders do not feel the need to inspire a shared vision. These findings actually support Maslach's (1997) theory regarding burnout: she believe that if employees feel good about what they do and that they are meeting the needs of their clients, they are less likely to burn out" (p. 112).