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Research Article

The Relationship between Anxiety Symptoms and Job Burnout: Mediating Role of Mindfulness and Suppression in Mental Health Workers

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Background: Mental health workers are exposed to substantial occupational stress owing to the emotional and interpersonal demands of their work, potentially increasing anxiety symptoms and contributing to job burnout. Mindfulness and emotion regulation may play important roles in this relationship.

Objectives: The present study aimed to examine the relationship between anxiety symptoms and job burnout, with particular emphasis on the mediating roles of mindfulness and expressive suppression among mental health workers.

Methods: This correlational, non-experimental study was conducted among mental health workers, psychologists, and social workers employed in medical centers and welfare organizations in East Azerbaijan Province, Iran, in 2022. A sample of 200 participants was selected using random cluster sampling. Data were collected using the Beck Anxiety Inventory, the Mindfulness Questionnaire, the Maslach Burnout Inventory, and the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire. The hypothesized relationships among the study variables were examined using structural equation modeling.

Results: The findings revealed a significant direct effect of anxiety symptoms on job burnout ($\beta = 0.31$, $t = 3.92$, $p < 0.001$), with anxiety symptoms accounting for approximately 26% of the variance in burnout. Mindfulness significantly mediated the relationship between anxiety symptoms and emotion regulation ($t = 2.05$, $p = 0.040$), as well as the relationship between anxiety symptoms and job burnout ($t = 4.42$, $p < 0.001$). However, the mediating role of emotion regulation in the relationship between anxiety symptoms and job burnout was not supported ($t = 0.521$, $p = 0.603$). Similarly, emotion regulation did not significantly mediate the relationship between mindfulness and job burnout ($t = 0.499$, $p = 0.618$).

Conclusion: The findings indicate that anxiety symptoms are significantly associated with job burnout among mental health workers, while mindfulness may serve as an important mediating mechanism in this relationship. These results highlight the potential value of interventions aimed at reducing anxiety symptoms and enhancing mindfulness as strategies for preventing occupational burnout and improving the quality of work life among mental health professionals.

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Extended Abstract

Introduction

In today's era, owing to the change in lifestyle and its complexity, people's lives have transformed and are linked with stress, depression, and anxiety. Along their employment, the employees of medical centers deal with numerous patients who have different personality traits and social needs. As a result, there is a clear possibility of experiencing anxiety during working hours to provide better services and obtain the satisfaction of patients, their companions, and the managers of the treatment department. With the repetition of these conditions, burnout is found in them in abundance. In this context, anxiety symptoms may affect employees' ability to cope with the demands of their professional responsibilities, while mindfulness may influence responses to stressful experiences. Thus, it is important to pay attention to these psychological variables for understanding occupational burnout among mental health workers.

Method

The research method was of non-experimental type and the design was correlational due to the exploration of relationships between variables. The statistical population included mental health workers, psychologists, and social employees working in medical centers and welfare organization of East Azerbaijan province in 2022. In the current research, owing to including four variables, through estimating a maximum of ten parameters for each variable and for each parameter, 20 respondents have been considered. As a result, 200 employees of the study community were selected and investigated by random cluster method. To undertake the study, the participants filled the informed consent form of the research and declared their readiness. Next, the researcher gathered the data in person and through completing the questionnaire. The collected information was employed to examine the relationships among anxiety symptoms, mindfulness, suppression, and job burnout as well as to determine the mediating effects of the study variables. Note that this research has received the Code of Ethics ID from Shahid Beheshti University Ethics Committee. In this study, the researcher implemented four instruments to measure the variables. One was the Beck Anxiety Questionnaire (Beck, 1990), which is a self-report questionnaire to measure the intensity of anxiety in adolescents and adults. The other was the Mindfulness Questionnaire (Bauer et al., 2006), a 39-item self-assessment scale developed by combining items from several questionnaires utilizing the factor analysis approach. Further, the researcher used Maslach and Jackson's (1981) Burnout Questionnaire to measure employee burnout. In order to measure suppression, the researcher used the emotion regulation questionnaire of Gross and John (2003).

Results

The research results revealed the mediating role of mindfulness in the relationship between anxiety and emotion regulation was confirmed: with a t-statistic value of 2.050 and a significance level of 0.040 at the 95% confidence level. Further, the mediating role of mindfulness in the relationship between anxiety and burnout was verified: with a t-statistic value of 4.42 and a significance level of 0.000 at a 99% confidence level. Nevertheless, the mediating role of emotion regulation in relation to anxiety and job burnout was not supported: with a t value equal to 0.521 and a significance level of 0.603. Also, the mediating

role of emotion regulation in the relationship between mindfulness and job burnout with a t statistic value was equal to 0.499. Again, the significance level of 0.618 was not confirmed either. These findings suggest that mindfulness had a significant mediating role in the examined relationships, while emotion regulation did not demonstrate a statistically significant mediating impact in the relevant paths.

Discussion

Based on the structural equation modeling test, the effect of anxiety on job burnout was confirmed with a path coefficient of 0.31 with a t-value equal to 3.92. Further, a significance level of 0.000 at the 99% confidence level, whereby 26% of employees' burnout can be predicted from their anxiety symptoms. The results of Pejman Thani et al.'s research (2019) indicated a significant relationship between anxiety, depression, and stress with employee burnout. Based on the present study findings, employee mindfulness was reported at a moderate level, reflecting a need to improve their mindfulness status. Additionally, burnout was also reported at a moderate level, which raises a red flag for healthcare centers considering the quality of work life for staff. It can be explained that what has a greater impact on mitigating burnout among healthcare personnel has been the effort to reduce staff anxiety. Accordingly, identifying anxiety symptoms and paying attention to mindfulness may contribute to better psychological functioning as well as help healthcare centers address occupational burnout.

Author Contributions: Hessam Mardanehvar was responsible for compiling, analyzing, and examining the findings, as well as drawing conclusions from the results and expanding and interpreting them. Masoud Ghokamali Lavasani was responsible for the overall supervision and strategic direction of the research process and contributed to compiling and finalizing the revisions of the manuscript. Zahra Taherifar contributed to the study as a thesis advisor and provided guidance throughout the research process.

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