

**More Than Minding
Oneself: Educating Social Care
Workers to Identify and Combat the
Causes of Occupational Burnout**

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Introduction to Presenters



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Key Points of Discussion

- Moral distress is a neglected aspect of occupational stress and burnout in the social care sector
- The primary cause of moral distress is inherent in social care work
- The reliance of social care legislation and frameworks for practice on the liberal conception of 'individualism' often clashes with other values in the workplace
- The solution is not just in self-care techniques but in implementing a new perspective on what it means to be human

Occupational Burnout

- A state of psycho-physical exhaustion, deterioration of relations, and a sense of professional inefficacy and disillusion (Santinello, 2007).

Consequences of Occupational Burnout

Examples:

- **Physical** (Cardiovascular disease, high cholesterol, obesity, hypertension and diabetes)
- **Psychological** (Insomnia, Exhaustive feeling, depressive symptoms)
- **Occupational** (Job Satisfaction, Absenteeism, Intent to Leave)

Recognised Causes of Occupational Stress/Burnout

- Unclear job expectations
- Dysfunctional workplace dynamics
- Extremes of activity
- Lack of social support
- Work-life imbalance

Symptoms of Occupational Burnout

Ask yourself:

- Have you become cynical or critical at work?
- Do you drag yourself to work and have trouble getting started?
- Have you become irritable or impatient with co-workers, or even those for whom you are caring?
- Do you lack the energy to be consistently aware and attentive?
- Do you find it hard to concentrate sometimes?
- Do you lack satisfaction from your achievements?
- Do you feel disillusioned about your job?
- Are you using food, drugs or alcohol to feel better or to simply not feel?
- Have your sleep habits changed?
- Are you troubled by unexplained headaches, stomach or bowel problems, or other physical complaints?

So....

- If you answered **yes** to any of these questions, you might be experiencing occupational burnout



But...

- One of the less discussed causes of occupational burnout is the issue of moral distress
- We believe that this is particularly true in social care work



Moral Distress

- Develops within the emotional, psychological and moral centres of the individual when a conflict arises between ‘what is the right thing to do’ and what organisational structures and policy enable the individual to do (Burston and Tuckett, 2013)
- A type of experiential incongruence felt within a social care worker when the decisions that they make in practice or their practice itself is in opposition to their inherent or learned values (Higgins et al, 2014)



Question?

- Is it possible that you have experienced Moral Distress in your work and have misinterpreted this as occupational stress?
- If so, did this arise because of a moral conflict between what you felt was the right thing to do and what you felt you were required to do by your organization policy?

Social Care In the Republic of Ireland: The Context

- Has experienced significant and rapid change in its recent history
- Arguably adopting more managerial approach to social care work
- The Social Care profession is now one of twelve Health and Social care Professions listed under the regulatory remit of the Health and Social Care Council (SCWRB, 2017)
- CORU provide Regulation of the Profession- *Standards of Proficiency for Social Care Workers* (SCWRB, 2017) & *Code of Professional Conduct and Ethics* (SCWRB, 2019)

Legislative and Normative Framework of Social Care work

- Where the social care field is regulated based on the assumption of the autonomous citizen and where social care workers practice on the assumption of the relational and dependent nature of their clients, this will result in an internal tension for the social care worker.
- As Baier (1987) has argued, the paradigm citizen for whom the legislation is drawn up is the Kantian individual who ought to be able to make choices for their life, and where they cannot make them, this is treated as an anomaly rather than as part of the human condition.

Analysis contd.

- But a Care Ethics approach ‘starts from the premise of an existential situation of mutual dependency, without attaching a negative value to this, and without thinking in terms of an opposition between dependency and autonomy’ Sevenhuijsen (1998 , p.113)
- Care Ethics highlight relationality and dependency as important characteristics of being human; therefore it is particularly suited to analysing policies and procedures in the social care field.

Code of Professional Conduct and Ethics for Social Care Workers (2019)

- Devised by the Social Care Workers Registration Board. It states that it expects ‘that all social care workers will comply with these standards and that the consistent application of these standards will benefit individuals.’ (Forward)
- The Code is divided into 4 separate headings: Conduct, Performance, Ethics, Responsibilities Specific to Social Care Workers.’
- In total, there are 156 responsibilities mentioned in the Code

Exercise

- Look at the following 2 responsibilities from the *Code of Professional Conduct and Ethics*. They each refer to the idea of relationality. What does each imply about the role of relationships in social care work?

Exercise continued

- 1 (a) You must treat service users as individuals, respecting their dignity, privacy and autonomy.
- 3.2 (b) You must not use your professional position to form a relationship of a sexual, inappropriate emotional or exploitative nature with any person.

Possible socio-educational interventions

- Learning self-care techniques important but not enough. Deals only with the individual feeling of frustration.
- Students and social care workers must learn and use critical skills to analyse the structures and policies that frame their work.
- Develop political skills to take action to change the policies and procedures of the workplace and field.

Selected References

- Kittay E. F. (1999) *Love's Labour: Essays on Women, Equality and Dependency*. Routledge, New York.
- Santinello M. (2007) *Link Burnout Questionnaire*. Guinti: Firenze, Italy.
- Sevenhuijsen S. (1998) *Citizenship and the Ethic of Care: Feminist Considerations on Justice, Morality and Politics*. Routledge, New York.