



The utility of manifest needs questionnaire (MNQ) for better selection and training of youth workers in therapeutic residential care: One agency's exploration



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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Motivation
Staffing patterns
Manifest needs questionnaire
Autonomy
Achievement

ABSTRACT

Administrators of youth Therapeutic Residential Care (TRC) centers are faced with unique staffing challenges. The current study aims to investigate these challenges and the ways in which administrators at one agency face them, emphasizing specifically, staff motivation and staffing patterns. To do this, we assessed youth workers and cottage coordinators (administrators) at a rural therapeutic residential care center in the Rocky Mountain region of the United States by measuring a) what motivates staff to work at the agency as measured by the Manifest Needs Questionnaire (MNQ), b) what are the staffing patterns by performance and turnover, and c) what is the interrelationship between performance, turnover and MNQ needs. The results indicate that cottage coordinators exhibited significantly higher needs for achievement (as measured by the MNQ) than youth workers. Additionally, cottage coordinators were significantly higher on autonomy than youth workers. Lastly, both indicated low/moderate dominance and moderate/high affiliation with little difference between the two groups. Based on these results, we present recommendations on recruitment, training and teambuilding for TRC centers.

1. Introduction

Historically, recruiting and maintaining high quality staff in child welfare settings has been challenging. Such settings oftentimes experience high staff turnover rates, recruiting challenges, and variability in service delivery (Child Welfare League of America- CWLA, 2009; DePanfilis & Zlotnik, 2008). In the United States and the United Kingdom, residential care facilities struggle with staffing due to many issues including: emphasis on permanency of placement, abuse scandals, and negative perceptions of residential facilities (Colton & Roberts, 2007). Many staff who work in residential care in the United States and in the United Kingdom experience burnout, low wages, difficulty with work-life balance, and a lack of professional respect (Colton & Roberts, 2007).

Therapeutic Residential Care (TRC) agencies are no exception to these ongoing staffing challenges. They, too, struggle to attract and retain effective staff. Approximately 50,000 children reside in residential treatment centers in the United States and the number of facilities is estimated at about 1600 (Coll & Haas, 2013; Roberts,

Battaglia, & Epstein, 1999). Centers that are able to attract and retain high-quality staff are a step ahead of others in delivering high quality services due to the large number of youth who reside in TRC's and the challenges they are facing (Hopkins, Cohen-Callow, Kim, & Hwang, 2010).

Given staffing challenges at TRCs, the focus of our study was to explore ways to address staffing challenges at a Joint Commission accredited TRC, particularly related to staff motivational needs and staffing patterns. The concepts, recommendations, and suggestions presented are directly tied to the Guidelines for Staffing in Child Welfare (2009). The first aim of this study was to explore the motivational needs of staff who work at a TRC as measured by the Manifest Needs Questionnaire (MNQ) and what differences exist between residential care professionals (RCP's) and cottage coordinators. We hypothesized that due to the high demands of the job and the need to coordinate staff and campers that cottage coordinators would have a high need for achievement and a high need for dominance. We hypothesized that both cottage coordinators and RCP's would have a low need for autonomy, because they live and work with one another and

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<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2018.09.032>

Received 11 June 2018; Received in revised form 20 September 2018; Accepted 21 September 2018

Available online 22 September 2018

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residents.

The second aim of our study was to explore the staffing patterns by performance, motivational need, and turnover. We hypothesized that there would be trends in performance level related to experience/turnover and motivational need. We hypothesized that staff with higher performance levels would have higher experience and less turnover. We hypothesized that staff with higher performance levels would have a higher need for achievement, need for dominance, and need for autonomy.

The final aim of our study was to determine the interrelationship between performance, turnover and MNQ needs. We hypothesized that lower performing new staff would have different motivational needs than higher performing experienced staff.

2. Review of literature

2.1. Therapeutic residential care

The following is a nominal definition for therapeutic residential care designed to be used internationally:

Therapeutic residential care (TRC) involves the planful use of a purposefully constructed, multi-dimensional living environment designed to enhance or provide treatment, education, socialization, support, and protection to children and youth with identified mental health or behavioral needs in partnership with their families and in collaboration with a full spectrum of community-based formal and informal helping resources. (Whittaker, Del Valle, & Holmes, 2014, p. 24).

The editors who developed this definition desired to encompass the critical elements of therapeutic residential care across nations.

TRC's often involve community-based centers or children's homes with schooling and treatment philosophies incorporated (Whittaker et al., 2016). TRC's have different models across cultures, theories, and countries. Some overarching principles of TRC's are as follows: do no harm; maintain a connection between families and TRC programs; maintain grounded in communities, cultures, and social relationships; human connections facilitate learning; and use evidence-based practices that can be replicated across TRCs regardless of their size (Whittaker et al., 2016).

3. TRC staffing challenges

Youth worker staff (typically bachelor degree level or below) and administration (typically masters' degree level) in TRC settings are faced with many professional challenges (Smith, 2003). Compared with other social services (e.g., hospitals, outpatient clinics), staff tend to lag in training for diagnosing, intervening and treating mental illness (Colton & Roberts, 2007; DeLeon & Denhardt, 2000). Many TRC staff begin their employment with little training or background in working with such youth even as the need for such understanding urgently grows (Coll, Kovach, Cutler, & Smith-Robinson, 2008; Colton & Roberts, 2007; Ringle, Ingram, Newman, Thompson, & Waite, 2007).

It is not surprising then that when compared to other social services settings, TRC settings consistently report higher incidences of employee attrition (Roberts et al., 1999). This occurs even though there are many reported benefits to these settings, such as varied tasks and functions, and community recognition for valuable work (Coll & Haas, 2013). However, TRC staff all too often face high role overload, heightened stress and burnout, relationship/role/boundary challenges, professional isolation, economic issues (e.g., scarcity of resources), lack of social/cultural opportunities, and lack of privacy (DeLeon & Denhardt, 2000). This reality is often exacerbated by an ongoing and challenging balance between professional and ethical issues (Smith, 2003). Coll and Haas (2013) and Weigel and Brown (1999) also noted that other challenges typically indicated by TRC staff include large caseloads, widely varied presenting client issues, and limited supervision.

Given these challenges, TRC staff supervisors are an important

group to consider since they lead the organization, hire staff, and conduct performance evaluations on staff (Hicks, Archer, & Whitaker, 1998). They are typically senior level, successful TRC staff promoted after at least 3–5 years of experience and with excellent performance. Studies cite the importance of hiring qualified candidates and providing training initiatives that best prepare these supervisors to perform in their roles (Landsman, 2007). Within this need is the high-performance demands that TRC agencies face, which has reportedly increased exponentially even as resources have not (Landsman, 2007).

Studies further cite that retention of TRC supervisors is an ongoing concern as well, due in part to the structural conditions of the workforce and the hectic organizational environment in youth residential treatment agencies (Landsman, 2007). There is no doubt that supervisors play a critical role in the function of any TRC (Hicks et al., 1998). Consequently, knowing how supervisors can more effectively work with staff for better service delivery and lower turnover is of urgent importance (Child Welfare League of America, 2009; DePanfilis & Zlotnik, 2008; Hopkins et al., 2010). Shinn, Morch, Robinson, and Neuner (1993) found that employees of residential child care programs should focus not only on individual coping strategies but that coworkers should support one another, and the agency should be design to support workers to deal with the stressors related to work. While there are many issues that influence turnover, such as role conflict, stress, and role overload (DePanfilis & Zlotnik, 2008; Hopkins et al., 2010), this study focused specifically on motivational needs of staff and supervisors that may influence turnover.

4. Manifest needs theory and questionnaire

The Manifest Needs Questionnaire (MNQ) is based on Manifest Needs Theory, which states that behavior is driven by the desire to satisfy manifest (easily perceived or most current) needs. These needs include: need for achievement, affiliation, autonomy and dominance (Steers & Braunstein, 1976). A need consists of physical, material, and psychological conditions, aspects, and circumstances, which a worker prefers to have in a work setting and which serve as an impetus for enhancing job motivation and job satisfaction.

Following is additional elaboration of the four manifest needs measured by the instrument.

Need for Achievement: 'achievement motivated' and therefore seeks achievement, attainment of realistic but challenging goals, and advancement in the job. There is a strong need for feedback as to achievement and progress, and a need for a sense of accomplishment.

Need for Affiliation: 'affiliation motivated' and has a need for friendly relationships and is motivated towards interaction with other people. The affiliation driver produces motivation, which stems from the need to be liked and held in popular regard. These people are team players.

Need for Autonomy: An individual with this need tends to rely upon their own decision-making and performance abilities. Their behavior tends to reflect their own beliefs, morals, attitudes, and desires rather than those placed upon them. There is a strong need to feel that their free will is not being stifled by a dominator.

Need for Dominance: This person is 'authority motivated'. This driver produces a need to be influential, effective and to make an impact. There is a strong need to lead and for their ideas to prevail. There is also motivation and need towards increasing personal status and prestige.

5. Method

5.1. Participants

Average age of staff at the residential treatment center was 27.6 (range 21–55, standard deviation 6.3). Fifty-seven percent were female and 43% male. Seventy-four percent of the participants indicated less

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