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Exploring Burnout in Batterer Intervention Programs

Angela D. Bahner
Longview Community College
LaVerne A. Berkel
University of Missouri–Kansas City

This study used the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) to explore burnout in a sample of 115 batterer intervention program (BIP) workers (56% female, 44% male) from four midwestern states. The purpose of this study was to explore the role that demographic variables, job-setting variables, supervisor support, and personality characteristics played in predicting burnout for BIP workers. Significant associations emerged for all aspects of burnout. Job-setting variables and personality characteristics were predictive of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, whereas job-setting variables were predictive of personal accomplishment. The findings suggest that job and person variables are important factors to consider for burnout prevention and coping strategies for BIP workers. In addition, the results show that compared to MBI subscale norms for mental health workers, BIP workers fell in the moderate range for emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, but in the high range for personal accomplishment.

Keywords: batterer intervention program; burnout; personality; job stress

In response to a growing awareness of domestic violence issues, services for victims and perpetrators of domestic violence have emerged since the early 1980s (Epstein & Silvern, 1990). Past research has given considerable attention to the susceptibility of stress and burnout in workers of shelters for battered women (e.g., Brown & O’Brien, 1998; Epstein & Silvern, 1990; McKenna, 1986). Reasons for this concern include work overload, exposure to danger, and extreme distress that are often present in domestic violence programs.
violence intervention programs, feelings of inadequacy in staff members, the urgent needs of battered women and their children coupled with the lack of resources to meet those needs, and the horror of the dynamics of abusive relationships (Epstein & Silvern, 1990; McKenna, 1986). Although shelters provide important support services to victims of domestic violence, batterer intervention programs (BIPs) have emerged as the most commonly used intervention for perpetrators of domestic violence (Davis & Smith, 1995). Given the stressors inherent to working with domestic violence issues, there is a concern about the effects of this work on service providers. Despite the wide use of BIPs in domestic violence intervention, little research has focused on those who provide services to domestic violence perpetrators.

BIP workers also have to deal with the horror of domestic violence and work with clients who many people may despise. In many instances workers in this area may also have to deal with high client recidivism (Shepard, 1992) and with the knowledge that client relapse in this area could mean harm to women and children (Iliffe & Steed, 2000). Some counselors who provide services to batterers acknowledged the challenge of remaining non-judgmental and finding ways to respectfully engage with domestic violence perpetrators (Iliffe & Steed, 2000). Given this potentially stressful work environment, and the widespread use of BIPs for domestic violence intervention, susceptibility to burnout for BIP workers is an important yet largely unexplored area. The purpose of the current study was to explore predictors of burnout in a sample of BIP workers.

The term burnout was first coined by Freudenberger (1974) to describe a state of emotional and physical depletion that resulted from pressures in the work environment of mental health practitioners. One of the most accepted definitions postulates that burnout comprises three main factors: emotional exhaustion (EE), depersonalization (DP), and a diminished sense of personal accomplishment (PA) (Maslach & Jackson, 1982). EE describes a state of being emotionally overextended and experiencing a lack of energy or dread of going to work. DP occurs when workers treat clients in detached, unfeeling ways, which can result in the objectification and dehumanization of clients. Diminished PA is evident when workers experience reduced feelings of competence and achievement in their work with people and can also include negative self-evaluations. The cost of burnout to human service agencies is twofold; workers can be debilitated, and in turn services provided to clients are detrimentally affected (Shinn, Rosario, Morch, & Chestnut, 1984).

A large body of research has concentrated on burnout among mental health professionals (Casas, Furlong, & Castillo, 1980; Cherniss, 1980; Etzion & Pines, 1986; Farber, 1983; Freudenberger, 1974; Van Auken, 1979) who often
experience a significant amount of stress on their jobs. As the amount of stress on the job increases, the likelihood of experiencing EE and DP also increases (Brown & O’Brien, 1998; Ross, Altmaier, & Russell, 1989). Sources of this stress might include the need to fulfill multiple roles, work overload, and, particularly in domestic violence work, exposure to potentially dangerous clients (Epstein & Silvern, 1990; Ross et al., 1989). Human service providers often enter their jobs with ideals that they will be successful in helping their clients and that they will be autonomous and have personal control over their work. Oftentimes, they also believe that their work will be meaningful and stimulating and that clients will be grateful and cooperative (Shinn et al., 1984). The failure of some jobs in human services to live up to these ideals may contribute to burnout. These frustrations could be magnified in BIP workers by a sense of powerlessness over clients’ abusive behavior toward others, similar to the feelings of inadequacy reported by shelter workers in dealing with the horror of abusive relationships (McKenna, 1986).

Social support has been well documented as a factor that may help people cope with stress (Ross et al., 1989) and thus may help reduce susceptibility to job-related burnout. Researchers have consistently reported that increased social support factors are associated with lower perceived experiences of burnout. For example, Brown and O’Brien (1998) reported that increased perceived social support from supervisors and from friends and/or family was associated with less EE and DP among a sample of shelter workers. Support from coworkers was also associated with lower levels of DP toward clients in a sample of domestic violence shelter workers (Epstein & Silvern, 1990).

Conversely, others have reported that the absence of social support was associated with higher levels of burnout among counselors (e.g., Ross et al., 1989). Similarly, McKenna (1986) reported a significant source of stress among shelter workers was an overall feeling of lack of support. Some workers described the lack of community recognition for the work being done in shelters as a significant source of stress, whereas others found that lack of support and appreciation from administration was most disturbing. Most workers also identified lack of support from other staff members as a problem. More recently, feelings of isolation for counselors providing services to domestic violence clients was described as a contributing factor to the experience of burnout, secondary only to direct service hours with a high percentage of domestic violence clients (Iliffe & Steed, 2000).

Researchers have often reported significant associations between demographic factors and the experience of burnout. For example, length of employment, sex, client contact hours, and relationship status were found to be associated with at least one of the three dimensions of burnout in
previous studies (Epstein & Silvern, 1990; Ross et al., 1989). However, aside from demographic factors, it has been acknowledged that the contribution of individual differences in predicting burnout has been largely overlooked (Kahill, 1988), despite literature that has suggested that such differences could be influential in people’s work experiences (VanYperen, Buunk, & Schaufeli, 1992; Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). Some studies have incorporated personality variables using the Five Factor Model (FFM; Costa & McRae, 1991) as a way to address this shortcoming in the literature.

The FFM of personality proposes that five global personality characteristics are useful in depicting individual differences (Costa & McRae, 1991). These factors are (a) Extraversion (cheerful, enthusiastic, optimistic, and energetic), (b) Agreeableness (courteous, flexible, cooperative, tolerant, forgiving, soft-hearted), (c) Conscientiousness (competent, hard-working, ambitious, and dependable), (d) Neuroticism/Emotional Instability (nervous, tense, depressed, frustrated, guilty, negative affectivity), and (e) Openness (imaginative, curious about internal and external experiences, unconventional). These characteristics are theorized to be stable over time and are not mutually exclusive.

Recent studies of service providers, such as health care workers and school psychologists, have provided evidence that personality factors are associated with the dimensions of burnout. For example, neuroticism was positively associated with increased experiences of EE and DP, whereas traits such as extraversion and agreeableness were associated negatively with DP (Mills & Huebner, 1996; Zellars, Perrewe, & Hochwarter, 2000). A sense of reduced PA has been found to be associated with lower levels of extraversion and openness and higher levels of neuroticism (Mills & Huebner, 1996; Zellars et al., 2000).

There were two major goals of the current study. First, we were interested in assessing the overall levels of burnout present in this sample of BIP workers. Second, given the literature suggesting that several factors, including demographic variables, job stress, social support, and personality variables, may be needed to explain burnout among mental health workers, the second purpose of the study was to examine the contribution of each of these factors in predicting burnout in this sample of BIP workers.

Method

Participants

The participants were 115 (female $n = 64$, 56%; male $n = 51$, 44%) workers from midwestern agencies that provide services to batterers. They...
were predominately White (n = 103, 90%), followed by Latino/a (n = 7, 6%), Black (n = 3, 3%), and Native American (n = 1) or Multiracial (n = 1, 1%). Their ages ranged from 19 to 69 years, with an average age of 43 years (SD = 11.77). The participants were mostly heterosexual (n = 100, 90%) and married (n = 64, 56%) or divorced (n = 22, 19%). Most were employed full-time (n = 69, 60%), had a master’s degree (n = 56, 49%), and on average worked 14 hrs per week (SD = 13.51) with domestic violence offenders. The average length of time that participants had worked in BIPs was 6 years (SD = 5.35). The participants were eligible for entry in five drawings for US$20 gift certificates.

Instrumentation

The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI). This inventory was used as a measure of burnout. The MBI was chosen because it operationally defines burnout on three separate scores (EE, DP, & PA) and is geared specifically to workers in the human service professions.

The MBI is a 22-item inventory with a 7-point Likert-type scale answer format (0 = never, 6 = every day). It contains three subscales: (a) EE, nine items, (b) DP, five items, and (c) PA, eight items. The MBI yields three different summed scale scores that cannot be combined for an overall burnout score. A high degree of burnout is represented by low scores on PA and high scores on EE and DP. Conversely, a low degree of burnout, or engagement with work, is indicated by high scores on PA and low scores on EE and DP. The three scales, although brief, have shown high internal consistency, with alphas of .90 for EE, .79 for DP, and .71 for PA (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996). For the current study, reliability coefficients were .88 for EE, .64 for DP, and .77 for PA. However, Item 17 had to be dropped from the PA scale to achieve an acceptable alpha level (from a = .49 to a = .77). The MBI has demonstrated acceptable convergent and discriminant validity, which supports its overall construct validity (Arthur, 1990).

The Perceived Social Support Scale (PSSS). This instrument measured support received from the social network of the participants in the context of job-related stress and delineates four sources (supervisors, coworkers, partner, friends and/or family). Ross et al. (1989) reported alphas ranging from .75 to .92 for the four subscales. For the current study, only the supervisor (four items) and coworker support (three items) subscales were used (α = .92 and .87, respectively). Each of these subscales uses a 4-point Likert-type format ranging from 0 (not at all) to 3 (very much). A total score is calculated by summing all item responses for each subscale. Higher scores are indicative of
greater levels of perceived social support. Numerous studies have supported the validity of the PSSS in predicting reactions to job-related stress across occupations (see review by House, 1981).

**Stress in General Scale (SIG).** The SIG assesses two types of perceived work stress. Pressure (six items) reflects job stress resulting from typical daily stressors, whereas threat (eight items) may reflect a high or overwhelming degree of stress (Stanton, Balzer, Smith, Parra, & Ironson, 2001). Participants are presented with a list of 14 phrases and asked to indicate whether or not each is descriptive of their jobs. Higher scores on both scales signify more stress perceived by the individual. Acceptable reliability coefficients have been reported for pressure (.88) and threat (.82) (Stanton et al., 2001). Alphas in the current study were .79 for pressure, and .73 for threat. Both factors correlated substantially with a one-item general measure of stress and with specific factors of the Job Stress Index (Sandman, 1992). In addition to clear evidence of convergent validity with other general stress measures, the SIG demonstrated discrimination from measures of job satisfaction. Fisher et al. (2000) supported the validation of SIG convergence with general measures of stress and discrimination from job satisfaction and negative affectivity.

**Comprehensive Personality and Affect Scales (COPAS).** The COPAS (Lubin & Van Whitlock, 2002b) is a self-report instrument that provides a measure of multiple dimensions of personality and affect. In the current study only the Personality Scales were used. The Personality Scale (53 items) provides an assessment of personality dimensions that parallel the FFM (see Costa & McCrae, 1991). Each item consists of one adjective (e.g., “gentle”) and is scored on a 5-point rating scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (a great deal). Respondents are asked to circle the number that is most descriptive of how they actually view themselves. The COPAS Personality Scale yields five subscales, which correspond to the FFM: Agreeableness (13 items), Openness to Experience (10 items), Conscientiousness (9 items), Extraversion (15 items), and Emotionality, which is a measure of neuroticism (6 items). Scores for each subscale were obtained by summing the ratings for each item on the respective scale, with higher scores indicating higher levels of the trait described by the scale.

In a sample of adults, reliability estimates for each of the five subscales ranged from .79 to .91 (Lubin & Van Whitlock, 2002b). In the current study, four of the five subscales were used because of previous research that has found significant relationships between personality dimensions and burnout. Reliability estimates were .88 (Openness), .85 (Extraversion), .89 (Agreeableness), and .85 (Emotionality). Adequate evidence for construct
validity, convergent validity, and discriminant validity was reported by Lubin and Van Whitlock (2002b).

A Demographic Questionnaire was used to record sociodemographic (age, sex) and job setting (hours per week working with offenders, years worked with offenders) variables.

**Procedure**

Forty agencies providing services to batterers were identified by state offices or domestic violence coalitions from several midwestern states. Cooperation was obtained from agencies via phone interviews with agency and/or program directors. Those who agreed to participate were mailed research packets that were distributed to any staff who provides services to batterers. Each packet contained a Letter to Prospective Participants, an explanation of the Study/Consent Form, a demographic sheet, the MBI, PSSS, SIG, and the COPAS. The measures were presented in an alternating fashion to control for order effects. Two hundred and five surveys were distributed to employees at the 40 agencies; 120 surveys were returned, with 5 incomplete, which were omitted from analysis, resulting in a 58% response rate.

**Results**

The degree of burnout present in this sample was investigated by computing means and standard deviations on each of the three scales on the MBI. Scores for the current sample were the following: EE, \( M = 15.86, SD = 8.80 \); DP, \( M = 6.64, SD = 4.69 \); and PA, \( M = 34.27, SD = 5.93 \). Normative data on the subscales of the MBI (Maslach et al., 1996) provide information on numerical ranges that are indicative of low, average, or high ranges of experienced burnout. High burnout is characterized by higher scores on EE and DP with lower reported PA, whereas low levels of burnout are indicated by lower scores on EE and DP and higher scores on PA. It is noted that these categories are intended to provide a rough assessment of the degree of experienced burnout, and that comparisons between this sample and the normative data are not presented as statistically significant results, but rather as information intended to place this sample’s scores into a larger context. Thus, when placed into categories of level of burnout experienced (low, average, to high), for a sample of mental health workers in the MBI manual (Maslach et al., 1996), it appears that this sample of BIP workers reported experiences of burnout were in the low to average levels.
Three hierarchical multiple regression analyses were conducted to test the hypotheses. In these analyses, each aspect of burnout (EE, DP, and PA) was regressed on the following groups of predictor variables, which were entered into the multiple regression equation in the order indicated: (a) sociodemographic and job-setting variables, specifically sex, hours per work working with offenders, and years working with offenders; (b) job-stress variables (Pressure and Threat subscales of the SIG); (c) social-support variables (supervisor and coworker support of PSSS); and (d) personality variables (Emotionality, Agreeableness, Extraversion, Openness to Experience, and Conscientiousness subscales of COPAS). This order was derived from a review of the literature examining significant predictors of burnout. See Table 1 for a summary of findings from the regression analysis.

For EE, sex and job-setting variables were not significant in the first step of the prediction model, $R^2 = .05$, $F(3, 111) = 1.76$, $p > .05$. Entry of the job-stress variables (pressure and threat) in the second step accounted for a statistically significant change in the prediction model, $R^2 = .36$, $F(5, 109) = 12.11, p < .001$; $\Delta R^2 = .31$, $\Delta F(2, 109) = 26.41, p < .001$. The third step (support from supervisor and coworkers) failed to result in a statistically significant change in the prediction model, $\Delta R^2 = .00$, $\Delta F(2, 107) = .02, p > .05$. Entry of the personality variables produced a statistically significant change in the final equation, $R^2 = .45$, $F(12, 102) = 6.87, p < .001$; $\Delta R^2 = .09; \Delta F(5, 102) = 3.30, p < .01$. BIP workers who reported higher levels of job-stress pressure and emotionality reported higher levels of EE.

Sex and job-setting variables were not significant predictors in the first step of the model for DP, $R^2 = .04$, $F(3, 111) = 1.53, p > .05$. Job-stress variables accounted for a statistically significant change in the prediction model in the second step, $R^2 = .25$, $F(5, 109) = 7.13, p < .001$; $\Delta R^2 = .21$, $\Delta F(2, 109) = 14.96, p < .001$, whereas the social-support variables in the third step failed to account for increased variance in the prediction model. The fourth step was significant on entry of the personality variables, $R^2 = .41$, $F(12, 102) = 5.85, p < .001$; $\Delta R^2 = .16; \Delta F(5, 102) = 5.46$. Higher perceived amounts of job-stress threat and lower reported levels of Agreeableness were related to increased DP in the final regression equation.

For PA, no significant relationship was found between sex and job-setting variables in the first step of the regression equation. A significant change in $R^2$ was found in the second step on the entry of job-stress variables, $R^2 = .20$, $F(5, 109) = 5.50, p < .001; \Delta R^2 = .19$, $\Delta F(2, 109) = 13.10, p < .001$. Entry of supervisor and coworker social support did not account for a statistically significant change in the prediction model on the third step. The addition of the personality variables in the fourth step resulted in
In the final model, lower reported levels of job-stress threat was related to higher levels of PA.

**Discussion**

The current study investigated the role of demographic, job stress, social support, and personality variables as predictors of burnout for a sample of workers in BIPs. Burnout is characterized by increased levels of EE and DP and reduced feelings of PA at work and is typically viewed as a continuous distribution.

**Table 1**

Results of Hierarchical Regressions of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) Subscales on Demographic and Job-Setting Variables, Job-Stress Subscales, Social Support, and Personality Subscales

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>MBI Subscales</th>
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<td></td>
<td>Emotional Exh</td>
<td>Deperson</td>
<td>Personal Accomplishment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Demographic and job setting</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>.03 .31</td>
<td>.07 .78</td>
<td></td>
<td>−.04</td>
<td>−.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours/week</td>
<td>.07 .93</td>
<td>.15 1.77</td>
<td>.08 1.05</td>
<td>−.04</td>
<td>−.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years worked</td>
<td>.04 .55</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Job stress</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Pressure</td>
<td>.32 3.23*</td>
<td>.18 1.73</td>
<td>.05 .41</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Threat</td>
<td>.19 1.98</td>
<td>.25 2.47*</td>
<td>−.35 −3.25*</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Social support</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Supervisor</td>
<td>.00 .1</td>
<td>.06 .75</td>
<td>.16 1.79</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Coworkers</td>
<td>.00 .00</td>
<td>.01 .13</td>
<td>.04 .49</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Personality</td>
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<tr>
<td>Openness</td>
<td>−.17 −1.65</td>
<td>−.05 −.49</td>
<td>.12 1.06</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Agreeableness</td>
<td>−.07 −.66</td>
<td>−.41 −3.77*</td>
<td>.03 .24</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Emotionality</td>
<td>.22 2.57*</td>
<td>.15 1.71</td>
<td>−.13 −1.41</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extraversion</td>
<td>−.05 −.48</td>
<td>.17 1.57</td>
<td>.10 .82</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conscientiousness</td>
<td>−.01 −.09</td>
<td>−.09 −.87</td>
<td>.11 1.02</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: N = 115. Reported betas are from final regression equations.

*p < .05.

a significant improvement in the model, $R^2 = .33$, $F(12, 102) = 4.13, p < .001$; $\Delta R^2 = .09, \Delta F(5, 102) = 2.71, p < .05$. In the final model, only lower reported levels of job-stress threat was related to higher levels of PA.
rather than a dichotomous variable, meaning that rather than simply being either absent or present, it is experienced from a range of low, average, to high degrees (Maslach et al., 1996). On investigating the experience of burnout for workers in BIPs, the current sample did not meet the criteria for burnout as specified by Maslach’s classification. The results are interesting in that although the average length of time worked per week with offenders was only 14 hrs, participants still indicated moderate levels of EE and DP, suggesting that work with perpetrators may be particularly taxing.

Conversely, the absence of burnout is thought to be represented by less experience of EE and DP, combined with higher reported experience of PA. This conceptualization of engagement with work seems to be more representative of reported experiences of this sample of BIP workers. This may be because although work with domestic violence perpetrators can be challenging, workers may feel a sense of pride and accomplishment knowing that they work with a marginalized population. Iliffe and Steed (2000) reported that though some counselors described feeling emotionally drained and physically exhausted by their work in domestic violence interventions, male and female counselors reported feeling energized particularly in regard to their work in groups for perpetrators. It appears that working to change abusive behaviors in men, although difficult, is stimulating and personally rewarding to those who provide these services.

The relatively high sense of PA in domestic violence intervention is not, however, limited to work with perpetrators. These results were also similar to findings reported by Epstein and Silvern (1990) for a sample of workers in domestic violence victims’ shelters. They indicated that though their sample, when compared to national norms, was less emotionally exhausted and had fewer feelings of DP, they also reported a higher degree of PA for their work with victims of domestic violence. It seems that overall, working with a difficult and important social issue such as domestic violence may include an overarching sense of PA that allows workers to remain engaged with their work.

The current study focused on variables predictive of burnout for workers in BIPs. For EE, a greater sense of pressure on the job (e.g., feeling hectic and pressured) and greater endorsement of personality traits associated with emotionality (neuroticism) was associated with higher levels of EE. EE is often experienced as a sense of being emotionally overextended and having a lack of energy or dread of going to work. Experiencing a greater sense of pressure on the job has been found to be related to EE in other studies as well (e.g., Brown & O’Brien, 1998; Epstein & Silvern, 1990). Although job pressures in domestic violence work can certainly be
expected to contribute to the experience of daily stressors and increased feelings of EE, individuals who are higher in emotionality or neuroticism may be even more prone to experiencing distress and thus more EE at work. Those high in neuroticism have been found to be more attentive to signals of impending distress (Watson & Pennebaker, 1989) and have shown higher levels of reactivity to stressors at work (Parkes, 1990) than people who are low on the trait of neuroticism. Others have also found that people high in neuroticism may be more likely to suffer a domestic violence consequence such as depression and anxiety (e.g., Costa & McRae, 1980). These findings, along with the results of the current study, support the conclusion that even above and beyond daily job stressors in domestic violence work, individuals high in neuroticism may be more likely to respond in ways characteristic of burnout, such as emotional fatigue and withdrawal.

Greater feelings of DP toward clients were related to experiencing a high or overwhelming degree of stress on the job (i.e., job stress threat) and lower levels of agreeableness. Depersonalization is described as a state in which clients are treated in detached and unfeeling ways, and it is plausible that a more urgent or overwhelming sense of stress in BIP work could have a profound effect on how clients are viewed by service providers. Epstein and Silvern (1990) suggested that increased feelings of anger were an important factor in DP for a sample of shelter workers. It is possible that the current sample was also exposed to situations that evoke frequent feelings of anger or frustration given the treatment focus in BIP groups. Indeed, previous research has suggested that counselors often experienced intense feelings of anger when dealing with clinical issues that may include trauma and revictimization of clients by violent perpetrators (Iliffe & Steed, 2000; Schauben & Frazier, 1995). Other factors such as taking too much responsibility for clients’ choices, concerns for family safety, and the impact of hearing traumatic material could contribute to BIP workers experiencing overwhelming stress on the job and increasing the chances of reacting with detachment from clients. The delicate balance of being empathically involved with clients, along with the need to be able to distance oneself from troubling material, has been identified as important for counselors doing domestic violence work (Iliffe & Steed, 2000).

Results indicated that above and beyond characteristics of job stress, inclusion of personality variables accounted for increased explained variance (16%) in DP. Less agreeableness was correlated with increased feelings of DP toward clients. This is fitting given that agreeableness is conceptualized as a largely interpersonal dimension of one’s personality (Lubin & Van Whitlock, 2002a). For example, those high in agreeableness have been
described as altruistic, sympathetic, and helpful to others (Costa & McRae, 1991) whereas those low in agreeableness could be more egocentric, suspicious of others, and antagonistic (Lubin & Van Whitlock, 2002a). Previous research has suggested that encouraging prosocial behaviors associated with agreeableness could be an important function of managers or supervisors in reducing the tendency to depersonalize clients (Zellars et al. 2000). Thus, although personality characteristics are thought to be relatively stable dimensions, attention to these characteristics, and perhaps encouraging clinicians to become more aware of their personal style, coupled with attention to specific behavioral skills, may be an important area for those supervising and working with a demanding client population.

Although the discussion here has highlighted potentially important associations of variables linked to EE and DP, it is important to note the relative absence of high levels of these factors in the current sample of BIP workers. In addition, within the context of job burnout, diminished PA is related to reduced feelings of competence and achievement and may also include negative self-evaluations. However, an interesting finding in the current study was the overall presence of a relatively high degree of PA. A decreased experience of overwhelming job stress for the current sample was associated with higher levels of PA. The high sense of PA found in the current sample is worthy of future investigation. Because high PA is indicative of engagement with work, exploring factors related to this experience in BIPs could be helpful to agencies themselves, and also to professionals who train workers in this type of setting.

The findings suggest that as well as attending to elements of job stress in clinical work with domestic violence perpetrators, those supervising BIP workers may also attend to individual characteristics that may influence work experiences and vulnerability to burnout on the job. In addition, it may be important for supervisors and employees to consider personality styles in relation to finding productive ways of coping with stress on the job.

Limitations and Future Research

The results of the current study are correlational in nature; as such no inferences about causal relationships can be made. Although we were able to obtain a relatively large sample of workers in BIPs, with an acceptable response rate from a number of different programs, random selection of participants was not possible. A majority of agencies that were able to be located were often part of statewide programs of which referral lists were readily available, and the sample consisted of BIP workers from four midwestern states. Thus, results must be generalized with some caution.
It is also unknown if results may reflect the diversity in nature and structure of work environments that existed for BIPs in this sample. For example, some are independent grassroots-type agencies with small staff sizes, whereas others are part of large state-mandated and regulated programs. Future research could further investigate specific working conditions of BIPs and effects on service providers. In addition, the nature of working relationships between facilitators, supervisors, and coworkers may provide useful information in understanding work environments for BIP workers.

The current study focused primarily on male BIPs within the context of heterosexual relationships. However, it is becoming more common for groups geared toward female batterers to be offered in conjunction with treatment for male batterers. Domestic violence is also being recognized within the context of same-sex relationships. Future research might work to identify stressors particular to working with batterers from these further marginalized groups.

References


Angela D. Bahner is a graduate of the counseling psychology program at the University of Missouri - Kansas City and a psychology instructor at Metropolitan Community College. Her research and teaching interests include research training and cultural competency issues in graduate training programs.

LaVerne A. Berkel is an associate professor in the counseling psychology and counselor education programs at the University of Missouri–Kansas City. Her research interests include domestic violence attitudes in college students, religious issues in counseling, and African American health.