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Workplace Stress and Reward: A Case Study of
Mental Health Workers' Experiences

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requirements for the degree of

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This report covers sensitive information therefore the name of the organisation and identifying references have been changed to protect confidentiality. The organisation's name has been given the pseudonym 'Recovery Care (RC)' and participants' names have been changed throughout the report.

Abstract

A healthy workplace is now widely recognised as vital in the achievement of optimal wellbeing for employees and a thriving organisation.

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into both the rewarding and stressful work experiences of Mental Health Workers (MHWs) in one community-based mental health care organisation. The focus was to shed light upon the strengths and weaknesses in this particular organisation for possible future remediation for staff and the organisation. The addition of reward and positive stress (eustress) ensured that there was also a focus upon positive qualities rather than solely pathology.

Staff of Recovery Care (RC), an organisation situated in the North Island that supports individuals in the community who experience mental illness were invited to individually take part in a semi-structured interview. Twenty MHWs volunteered to participate ranging in ages 18 to 64 years old, with 15 participants identifying themselves as New Zealanders (10 NZ European, 5 NZ Maori and 5 other) and 16 as women.

MHWs' interview narratives were transcribed into a written format, thematically analysed and clear patterns and themes emerged. These were discussed in combination with relevant literature and theory, which thereafter supported the ability to provide recommendations for the organisation.

The findings identified several areas that affect the health and wellbeing of MHWs and the functioning of the organisation. MHWs found working with clients, making a difference and having meaningful work to be most rewarding. Elements of eustress and strength were found in working with clients, competing demands, team/colleagues and certain aspects of the job (diversity, autonomy and flexibility). However the majority of MHWs found clients, management, change in management and competing demands to be distressing. Other weaknesses were around pay, resources and inadequate training. Upon further examination it became clear that a lack of reward, mismanagement and pay had a major impact on MHWs' perception of their future with the organisation.

This research highlights the importance of engaging with employees and gaining insight into their individual experiences of rewarding and stressful aspects in their work to be able to create healthier thriving workplaces with happy employees.

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