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THE EFFECTS OF
OCCUPATIONAL STRESS ON THE FAMILY
IN FIVE OCCUPATIONS

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To
Heather

Abstract

An experimental study was conducted which investigated the effects of various sources of occupational stressors, life event stressors, and housework stressors on a number of criterion variables assessing the levels of family disruption, marital stress, marital communication, and psychological health. In addition, the moderating effects of both social support mechanisms and the personality construct of locus of control were investigated. An extension of the design included comparing the results of this investigation across five occupational groups, sampling the occupational categories of professional (represented by barristers and solicitors), intermediate non-manual (represented by primary school teachers and insurance salesmen), skilled non-manual (represented by ambulance officers), and semi-skilled non-manual (represented by prison officers). In addition, the levels of effects on the four criterion variables were assessed from two viewpoints, that of the husband's and that of the wife's. A number of reviews were made, covering theoretical issues concerning the type of model proposed, a discussion of various concepts of the term stress, an analysis of sources of occupational stress, a discussion of two moderators of the effects of stress, and a

comprehensive review of previous studies investigating the effects of stress on the family.

The first stage of the analysis of the results utilized analysis of variance and multiple regression to compare the occupational groups across the various measures, and to investigate the relationship between the occupational and life event stressors and the various criterion variables for each occupational group separately. The results obtained for the comparisons of occupational groups suggested that prison officers perceived their job as being more stressful than did the other occupational groups, on four of the dimensions, those of role conflict, role ambiguity, work underload, and co-worker conflict. In addition, the results indicated that prison officers were consistently high in their assessment of the impact of their occupation on the family. As well, a comparison of moderator variables across the occupational groups showed significant differences in three of the social support variables. These were support by supervisor, co-workers and friends. Support by co-workers and support by friends tended to be similar for all groups, suggesting that the job incumbents may see these two as basically the same. For the personality measure of locus of control, the results showed that prison officers tended towards external orientation and insurance salesmen tended towards internal orientation. For the investigation of the relationship between the stressors and the criterion variables, the overall pattern suggested that job qualities (work overload, work underload) and organizational role (role conflict, role ambiguity) were important stressors effecting marital relationships. For the

level of impact on the family, the stressor variable assessing the lack of free time as a result of work was most important. Within these broad statements of results however, many specific findings were indicated, showing clear differences in effects across the various occupational groups. For example, prison officers perceived a higher impact on the family from their job, in comparison with the other occupational groups studied.

The second stage of the analysis of results used multiple regression to investigate the interaction between all the variables in the design for all the occupational groups combined. Both the stressor and the moderator variables were considered as predictor variables in the regression analysis, with the criterion variables corresponding to the various effects of stress measures. Differences in the effects of various stressors and moderators were obtained, and clear indications of overlap between the husband's and wife's stressors were found. For example, the stressor category of the wife's stresses of housework was found to have significant adverse effects on the level of a number of the husband's criterion variables.

Finally, the results obtained clearly showed the importance of assessing stress from a number of areas, including both the husband's and wife's occupation and the wife's housework. In addition, the importance of moderator variables, especially in the area of social support, was clearly shown. The value of measuring a number of stress sources and moderators was demonstrated by the significant increases in the levels of explained variance over those usually obtained in research of this nature.

Preface

The research presented in the following pages developed as a result of a major study of the sources and effects of occupational stress in prison officers (Voges, Long, Roache and Shouksmith, 1982). It became clear to the researchers in this study that a major area of impact of occupational stress was on the family and children of the job incumbent. Surprisingly, research in this vitally important area was almost nonexistent.

In addition, the variability of the effects of stress on the individual suggested that some factor was present to moderate the effects of the various stressors. The literature has shown the importance of moderator variables in this area. In view of this, any current research into occupational stress must take into account the complexities of the situation and the effects of the relevant moderators. This was attempted in the present research.

The following pages present theoretical and empirical justifications for a three-factor model of stress. Despite its apparent simplicity, this model subsumes within it the possibility for complexity, taking into account the importance of interaction between the three major factors comprising the model. It is hoped that this

presentation of the research will show that methodological approaches already in existence have not been used to their full capability. When extended as outlined here, these approaches show considerable explanatory power in investigating the complex link between occupational stress and its effects.

My thanks are due to both Doctor Nigel Long and Professor George Shouksmith for their valuable assistance and critical comments. Between them, they have made the last three years of my academic life a rewarding and stimulating experience.

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