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**SPOTLIGHT ON COMMUNITY WORKERS:
EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIPS AMONG STRESS
RELATED VARIABLES AND EVALUATING THE
EFFECTS OF A WELL-BEING INTERVENTION.**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
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at Massey University, Albany.

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ABSTRACT

The current research is conducted in two phases. Phase one investigates 223 community workers in terms of stress related variables. Phase two evaluates “Thriving in the Stress Place”, a well-being intervention designed for community workers to enhance well-being and coping resources and decrease dysfunctional thinking.

Community workers are an under researched sector of society and the economy. The limited previous research suggests that they are vulnerable to negative stress related effects, including burnout. A survey questionnaire was used to collect quantitative data at 3 time periods over 4 months. The variables of burnout, personality, well-being, coping resources, and dysfunctional attitudes were investigated using the data obtained from the first survey. Results indicated that the community workers were experiencing high burnout in the form of reduced personal accomplishment. Community workers have never been profiled in terms of personality. Personality profiles generated from the NEO-FFI (Costa & McCrae, 1989) showed that they were high in openness to experience, suggesting an unconventional orientation, and low in conscientiousness, suggesting a relaxed attitude towards pursuing goals. Levels of cognitive well-being, specifically life satisfaction and domain satisfaction were slightly low and levels of affective well-being, coping resources, and dysfunctional attitudes were average.

The current research provided preliminary support for the three dimensional model of well-being, consisting of life satisfaction, positive affect, and negative affect, measured by the Satisfaction With Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985) and the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988) respectively. Factor analysis provided confirmatory evidence of the orthogonality of the three scales. Correlational analyses revealed different patterns of relationships between each well-being aspect and specific variables. Regression analyses demonstrated that different predictors were significant for each aspect of well-being. This suggests that all three aspects are needed to fully understand the complex construct of well-being.

The well-being intervention adhered to the transactional model of stress and coping (Lazarus, 1966) and focused on the role of appraisal in stressful situations and the enhancement of coping resources. A quasi-experimental design was used. The experimental group consisted of 159 community workers and a further 77 community workers formed the control group. Quantitative data were collected at pre-training, post-training, and follow-up. Significant pre-intervention differences were detected between the experimental and control group. A series of repeated measures analyses of variance detected no significant differences between the experimental and control group over time as a result of the intervention. Significant differences were also not found when controlling for neuroticism. However, when the experimental group was separated into a group that implemented the strategies learnt in the workshop and a group that did not attempt to do so, the intervention significantly reduced negative affect and dysfunctional attitudes for the group who implemented the strategies. This finding highlights the need for researchers to pay more attention to assisting participants with enhancing and maintaining post-training effects.

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