Does stressful events in life affects mental health at work?

Angelo Soares
Full Professor
UQAM
Dept. Organization and human resources
E-mail : soares.angelo@uqam.ca
Web site: www.angelosoares.ca

Mental Health

- Erik Erickson tells us that someone once asked Freud in one of his conferences:

  What is a healthy life?

- The audience was expecting a very long conference, but Freud responded briefly:

  To have a healthy life, we need:

  " to love and to work."

The Context

- Michel Foucault in his book "Mental Illness and Psychology" explains that our psychological coherence is different from organic cohesion, and that mental health problems cannot be isolated from the context, from the reality where the individual is situated.   (Michel Foucault)

Mental Health

Mental health may be defined as: "the state of psychological equilibrium of an individual, at a given time, which can be assessed using three elements:

1) the level of subjective well-being,

2) the use of cognitive skills (we can add here emotional and relational skills too) and

3) the quality of the relationships with the environment.

This state of equilibrium is the dynamic result of the interactions between biological, psychological and contextual factors.

(Quebec Mental Health Committee - CSMQ)

Mental Health

- Mental health is influenced by multiple and interdependent factors such as economic, social, cultural, environmental and political conditions.

- Thus, any condition, that may interfere with the reciprocal adaptation between the person and his or her environment, constitutes a barrier to his or her mental health. Conversely, any condition that can facilitate this reciprocal adjustment promotes and supports the mental health.

Work and Mental Health

- Work has a significant importance for our mental health.

- It may be a structuring factor, source of pleasure and psychological well-being;

- But it can also be a destructing factor, source of sufferings , physical and mental health problems.

Objective

- Our objective will be to analyze the impact of the organizational context on mental health in three different occupational groups using a quantitative approach.

- All studies were done in Québec – Canada.

- All groups are unionized.

Objective

- Study 1: Education Sector Workers (n=457)
- Study 2: University Professors (n=328)
- Study 3 – Professionals in Education sector (n= 1833)

Mental Health Indicators

- Stress (Ilfeld Index)

- Burnout (Maslach Burnout Inventory)

- Depression (Beck Depression Inventory)

- Anxiety (Beck Anxiety Inventory)

- Hopelessness (Beck Hopelessness Scale)

Organizational Variables

Areas of Working Life Scale (Leiter & Maslach):

- Workload

- Control

- Reward

- Community

- Organizational Justice

- Values

Source: Maslach, C., & Leiter, M. P. (1997). *The truth about burnout : how organizations cause personal stress and what to do about it (1st ed.). San Francisco, Calif.: Jossey-Bass.*

Study 1

EDUCATION SECTOR WORKERS

Predictor Organizational Variables for Mental Health Problems – Study 1

	v1	v2	v3	v4	v5	v6	% explained
Stress	*			*		*	74.9
Depression	*	*	*				87.6
Anxiety	*	*		*			89.0
Hopelessness	*	*		*		*	86.2
Burnout	*			*		*	77.1
Total	5	3	1	4	0	3	

V1 -   Workload

V2 -   Control

V3 -   Reward

V4 -   Community

V5 -   Justice

V6 -   Values

Study 2

UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS

Predictor Organizational Variables for Mental Health Problems – Study 2

	v1	v2	v3	v4	v5	v6	% explained
Stress	*		*			*	77.0
Depression	*					*	85.1
Hopelessness	*			*			75.3
Burnout	*		*				84.3
Total	4	0	2	1	0	2	

V1 - Workload

V2 - Control

V3 - Reward

V4 - Community

V5 - Justice

V6 - Values

Study 3

PROFESSIONALS IN EDUCATION SECTOR

Predictor Organizational Variables for Mental Health Problems – Study 3

	v1	v2	v3	v4	v5	v6	% explained
Stress	*	*	*			*	73·5
Depression	*		*	*		*	91.5
Anxiety	*		*	*	*		93·4
Hopelessness	*		*	*		*	89.2
Burnout	*		*			*	77·2
Total	5	1	5	3	1	4	

V1 - Workload

V2 - Control

V3 - Reward

V4 - Community

V5 - Justice

V6 - Values

Mental health: an individual fragility?

Study 1

EDUCATION SECTOR WORKERS

Ten stressful events in daily life (%) – Study 1	
In the last year...	**(%)**
Your mother has passed away	5.9
Your father has passed away	8.1
Your spouse has passed away	0.9
One of your children has passed away	0.9
Someone who was very dear to you has passed away	22.2
You have divorced or separated	9.6
Your spouse has been or is seriouly ill	6.4
One of your children has been or is seriously ill	3.3
Someone in your family has been or is critically ill	22.8
You have experienced domestic violence	3.7

Ten stressful events in daily life by groups (%)- Study 1

In the last year	(%)
G1. No stressful events	53·9
G2. One or two stressful events	37·3
G3. More than three stressful events	8.9
Total	100.0

Stressful events in daily life and mental health indicators – Study 1

	Group 1 – G1		Group 2 – G2		Group 3 – G3	
	Average	SD	Average	SD	Average	SD
Stress	25.6	18.0	29.7	18.7	34.5	21.7
Burnout	20.7	11.9	22.4	11.7	24.7	15.2
Depression	9.4	8.4	10.8	7.9	13.0	11.2
Anxiety	6.2	6.7	7.5	7.0	10.3	11.3
Hopelessness	4.7	4.0	4.8	3.9	5.4	4.9

Mental health: an individual fragility?

- Results of the analysis of variance between three groups are significant for Stress, Depression Symptoms and Anxiety Symptoms .

- No statistically significant differences for the other mental health indicators.

Mental health: an individual fragility?

- Using Scheffé's test, multiple comparisons allow us a more detailed analysis of these differences for Stress, Depression Symptoms and Anxiety Symptoms.

- In all three cases, the average for G3 scores are significantly higher than those of the other two groups (Scheffé test – Stress p=0.02; Depression p=0.05; Anxiety p=0.01).

- However, differences between G1 and G2 are not statistically significant.

23

Study 2

UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS

Ten stressful events in daily life (%) – Study 2	
In the last year...	(%)
Your mother has passed away	4.3
Your father has passed away	7.1
Your spouse has passed away	0.8
One of your children has passed away	0.8
Someone who was very dear to you has passed away	13.3
You have divorced or separated	6.3
Your spouse has been or is seriouly ill	4.3
One of your children has been or is seriously ill	4.3
Someone in your family has been or is critically ill	17.6
You have experienced domestic violence	0.0

Ten stressful events in daily life by groups (%)- Study 2

In the last year	(%)
G1. No stressful events	60.4
G2. One or two stressful events	34.1
G3. More than three stressful events	5.5
Total	100,0

Stressful events in daily life and mental health indicators – Study 2

	Group 1 – G1		Group 2 – G2		Group 3 – G3	
	Average	SD	Average	SD	Average	SD
Stress	26.8	17.6	32.3	17.5	36.7	20.7
Burnout	21.4	12.6	24.2	11.6	24.0	13.9
Depression	9.9	8.7	12.1	8.1	13.3	9.3
Hopelessness	5.7	4.6	5.9	4.2	6.4	4.8

Mental health: an individual fragility?

- Results of the analysis of variance between the three groups indicate that there are not statistically significant differences between the three groups and mental health indicators.

Study 3

PROFESSIONALS IN EDUCATION SECTOR

Ten stressful events in daily life (%) – Study 3

In the last year...	(%)
Your mother has passed away	2.9
Your father has passed away	3.7
Your spouse has passed away	0.3
One of your children has passed away	1.2
Someone who was very dear to you has passed away	13.5
You have divorced or separated	6.4
Your spouse has been or is seriouly ill	4.0
One of your children has been or is seriously ill	4.2
Someone in your family has been or is critically ill	23.9
You have experienced domestic violence	2.2

Ten stressful events in daily life by groups (%)- Study 3

In the last year	**(%)**
G1. No stressful events	57.7
G2. One or two stressful events	39.1
G3. More than three stressful events	3.2
Total	100.0

Stressful events in daily life and mental health indicators – Study 3

	Group 1 – G1		Group 2 – G2		Group 3 – G3	
	Average	SD	Average	SD	Average	SD
Stress	22.8	15.5	25.3	15.8	33.2	20.9
Burnout	19.6	11.3	20.7	11.0	23.3	12.5
Depression	7.9	7.1	8.7	7.3	12.6	10.9
Anxiety	5.4	5.9	6.2	6.3	9.5	8.6
Hopelessness	3.8	3.3	3.9	3.5	5.2	4.2

MENTAL HEALTH: AN INDIVIDUAL FRAGILITY?

- Results of the analysis of variance between three groups are significant for all six mental health indicators.

Mental health: an individual fragility?

- Using Scheffé's test, multiple comparisons allow us a more detailed analysis of these differences for the six mental health indicators: Stress, Burnout, Depression, Anxiety, and Hopelessness.
- In all three cases, the average for G3 scores are significantly higher than those of the other two groups.
- However, differences between G1 and G2 are not statistically significant.

Conclusion

- To have an impact in our mental health, one must live 3 or more stressful events in the last year.

- These group who lived 3 or more stressful events in the last year are very small.

- In this way, we may state that stressful events you may experience in your private life affect very marginally mental health at work.

- Mental health indicators at work are stronger correlated to organizational variables than to stressful events of our daily life.

Limits

- Further studies are necessary as we have these three groups in the Education Sector.

- One can not generalize these results

- They are cross sectional

- Other occupational groups must included in our study

Conclusion

- However, we may say that one must be more aware and proactive considering the importance and central role of organizational variables for prevention of mental health problems in the workplace.

- One must stop individualizing and blaming the individual for the stressful events that we may all experience in our lives as the source of mental health problems in the workplace.

soares.angelo@uqam.ca

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR ATTENTION

ANY QUESTIONS DO NOT HESITATE TO E-MAIL ME