Author's response to reviews

Title: Prevalence and associated factors in burnout and psychological morbidity among substance misuse professionals

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Author's response to reviews: see over
July 30, 2007

Dear Professor Norton

Re: Prevalence and associated factors in burnout and psychological morbidity among substance misuse professionals

Thank you for considering the above-titled manuscript for publication in BMC Health Services Research.

As requested, we have addressed all comments from the three peer reviewers. We hope you would now accept the manuscript for publication.

Our point-by-point response to the reviewers’ comments is attached. Thank you for your cooperation.

Yours sincerely

Dr Adenekan Oyefeso
Reader
Point by point response to reviewers’ comments

Reviewer 1: Lloyd

Response to Reviewer 1

The abstract is too long. They do not need to report all the actual results at this point.

*The abstract has been revised accordingly*

The use of such words as numerous studies should be avoided.
The authors should use third person always.
Ethical considerations should be outlined.
A subheading data analysis would be useful.

*The manuscript has been revised accordingly.*

The authors do not report the PA results.

*PA results have been included in the manuscript*

The discussion should be expanded to discuss in some detail what the results indicate.
The conclusion is too brief, it needs to sum up and say what the implications are.

*These points have been addressed under Discussion and Conclusion*

Table one should give numbers plus percentages

*The number and percentages of the sample characteristics have been included in the text, rather than as a table. (page 6).*
Response to Reviewer 2: Bovier

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

Based on the data presented in the paper, the authors need to add the following information:

1. The authors choose to present only the results for high scores on the DP and EE scale, but not for the PA scale. This is not acceptable, because the PA scale is an important aspect of burnout and comparisons can be made with other studies. Alternatively, some authors defined burnout as a high score on either DP or EE scales, but this is not what has been reported here. I suggest that the authors report the descriptive results for the 3 scales, including mean scores and SD, and use the "combined" criteria to identify predictors of burnout.

   The revised manuscript now includes the Personal Accomplishment (PA) scale. Summary statistics of the three burnout scales are presented in Table 3.

2. The authors decided to include only predictors that affected at least 66% of the respondents... Why? I understand that they had to make a choice over the 112 related stressors, but why choose this criteria? Unfrequent stressors can have an important impact. This point needs to be discussed in the method section.

   We conducted factor analysis on the 112 predictors to make the analysis more manageable. Four types of stressors emerged from this analysis; these were used as predictors in the logistic regression analysis.

3. The discussion lacks some comparisons with other studies conducted in similar health professionals groups. Based on table 1, it is also necessary to discuss whether the results of the analyses still hold across the different health professional groups. Because of the heterogeneity of the sample, this point needs to be addressed in the method section. One possibility would be to adjust the results for age, gender and professional groups.

   The influence of occupational (professional) groups was controlled for in all logistic regression models. Age and gender were independent variables and
were included in logistic regression if they met the Hosmer and Lemeshow criterion.

4. Although the answer rate is excellent after only one reminder, the authors do not discuss how the non response bias could have affected their results. Was the response rate similar across age, gender and professional groups? If not, how can it affect the results? This point needs to be addressed in the methods section and in the limitations.

We have addressed the problem of non-response bias in the limitation of study. We acknowledged that burnout and morbidity rates could be different in non-responders.

5. I am not in favor of presenting the figure as "A predictive model of burnout...". Previous paper on the same topic have shown that models based on cross-sectional data are not not reliable and are definitely not "predictive" (Mac Mannus). I would even suggest to suppress this figure, or present it "Associations between stressors, components of burnout and psychological morbidity".

We have removed Figure 1 from the manuscript

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Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

The abstract length needs to be reduced to comply with the journal requirements.
The introduction should end with the study objectives and hypothesis. The paragraph on the major benefits to measure burnout could be moved after the second paragraph of the Background.

The abstract is much shorter and, as much as possible, complies with journal requirements
Regarding the tables, the beta coefficients and the constant term can be removed from the tables, the authors should also specify on the tables 2-4 that these are multivariate predictors.

*These comments have been addressed in Table 4 which is the combination of all logistic regression tables.*
Response to Reviewer 3: Crome

The following suggestions should be dealt with under Minor Essential Revisions:

Abstract
When was the study undertaken?
Was the questionnaire only mailed once?
Page 2 - Methods - 6th line down - It is not usual to put a reference in an Abstract, i.e. ‘Survey (1)’
Page 3 - 6th line down - Does the term ‘job related factors’ equate to work related stressors, to burnout factors or to both?
Conclusions - Might be worth considering some recommendation and / or future research in light of the findings.

The date of study has been included in the revised manuscript
There was a second mailing; this has been included in the Method section
The abstract has been revised along the suggestion on references

Background
It might be useful to add some references in the first few lines of the first paragraph.

This point has now been addressed.

Reference 5 is some 10 years old – would we expect the situation to be better or worse now?

We have expanded and updated the study references in general.

Page 5 - 5th bullet point – Is the word ‘productivity’ appropriate for this group?

The word ‘performance’ has replaced ‘productivity’

Methods
When was the study carried out?

This has been stated in Page 5 under Methods.

How was the list compiled? How long did it take to complete?
The detail of the sampling frame and the time taken for responding have been stated in Page 6, under Subjects

How many sent responses second time round?

The percentage of responders in the second wave was 14% (page 6)

Page 6 - Line 17 – It seems that apart from the variables listed at this point, there are additional ones in the table, i.e. deadlines, staff shortages, work overload, time pressure to complete tasks, centralised decision making, shortage of essential resources, high expectation. It would be helpful to know what exactly constituted ‘job stressors’ and how many there are.

Job stressors were described in page 7 under Independent variables.

On what basis was it decided to include job stressors if at least two thirds of the sample considered them a problem? Is there a reference for this? Are they the ones described above, i.e. deadlines, staff shortages, work overload, time pressure to complete tasks, centralised decision making, shortage of essential resources, high expectation?

This part of the analysis has been completely revised. We now have four types of stressors that emerged from factor analysis. These were used as independent variables in logistic regression.

Very early on in the paper is would be useful to clarify what are dependent variables, and what constitutes the job or work related stressors and work profile variables (last line on this page).

There are separate headings now for independent and dependent variables (pages 6-7)

2nd last line – check grammar

This has now been addressed.

Results
Page 7 - Reliability of measures – Please explain how was this determined.
The procedure used was the Cronbach Alpha, described under Statistical analysis.

Page 7 - Last paragraph – Perceived job stressors: It is not clear to me how this was calculated.

The procedure for calculating the stressors has been described under Independent variables (page 7) and also under Job stressors (page 10).

Page 8 - Should the third paragraph heading be underlined?
Discussion
I would underline that 8 out of 10 respondents suffer from psychological morbidity. This is a startling finding, which should be emphasised. While you might not expect burnout to be as pronounced, still over 50% and 2/5 report this extreme condition and more so than other mental health professionals.

Page 11 - Can you outline any other relevant limitations e.g. response rate? Can you suggest any next steps? What detailed recommendations do you have for service providers, managers and commissioners? What explanation(s) may lie behind the findings?

Page 12 - 3rd line down – Consider replacing ‘productivity’ – satisfaction, retention, improved patient outcomes?

Page 19 - ICC – Write in full

All the points have been addressed:

- The limitations of study were described in page 15
- There as suggestions on translating the findings into practice such as supporting substance misuse professionals at work (p16)
- Some explanations of the findings have been proposed (p 15-16).