

## JUSTICE AND HEALTH: FLUCTUATIONS IN THEIR RELATIONSHIP DURING ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

\*C. Gail Hepburn, PhD, Department of Psychology, University of Lethbridge, Michael Kerr, PhD, School of Nursing, University of Western Ontario, Selahadin Ibrahim, MSc, Institute for Work & Health, and Ginette Rodger, RN, PhD, The Ottawa Hospital.

The relationship between procedural justice and burnout was studied in a sample of nurses in three recently merged hospitals in Ontario, Canada. Several different models of nursing care practice had been in use. After the merger, however, the hospital developed a new common model to guide clinical nursing practice. The introduction of this new model provided a unique opportunity for a longitudinal study to investigate how the strength of the relationship between procedural justice and burnout fluctuates over the course of the implementation of an organizational change initiative.

Procedural justice is related to many worker attitudes and behaviours. One reason for these findings is that fair treatment signals to workers that they are valued by their employers. It is only recently that injustice has been considered a stressor, and accordingly, been found to be related to worker health. Justice has been strongly related to various outcomes in cross-sectional studies of workplace change, largely attributed to the uncertainty inherent in such times. During times of uncertainty people look for signals that they are valued by their employer and at such times justice is expected to exert a strong influence on outcomes. The current study is unique in that it compares the impact of fair treatment on the outcome not only during the change process itself, when uncertainty is expected to be high, but also in two relatively 'normal' times, before the change is implemented and one year following the implementation of the change.

Surveys were delivered to all nursing units and individual nurses returned completed surveys to a sealed drop-off box. Nurses completed questionnaires at three points in time: during the pre-implementation phase prior to the change in their model of nursing care (Time 1), one year later during the model implementation or 'roll-out' phase (Time 2), and in the post-implementation phase, one year after the Time 2 questionnaire (Time 3). Two hundred and eight nurses completed these measures for all time points.

*Preliminary analyses indicate that at each point in time perceived procedural justice was significantly and negatively associated with burnout. Perceptions of fairness were related to lower levels of burnout. In addition, analyses suggest that this relationship was significantly weaker pre-implementation (Time 1) compared to during implementation (Time 2). Further, this relationship does not appear to lose strength in the long term follow up period (Time 3). We discuss*

*the role that uncertainty may play in explaining the differences in the strength of these correlations.*

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR: C. Gail Hepburn, Department of Psychology, University of Lethbridge, 4401 University Drive, Lethbridge, AB, Canada, T1K 3M4.