EXISTENTIAL CORRELATES OF BURNOUT AMONG MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS IN HONG KONG

Of the mental health professionals (mental health counselors, clinical psychologists, psychiatrists, psychiatric nurses, and social workers) living in Hong Kong, 132 were surveyed about existential aspects of burnout. Instruments included the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach & Jackson, 1981), the Purpose in Life Test (Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1969), and the Seeking of Noetic Goals Test (Crumbaugh, 1975). As hypothesized, purpose in life and motivation to seek purpose were found to be significant existential correlates of burnout. Specifically, purpose in life was correlated with the personal accomplishment dimension of burnout, whereas motivation to seek purpose was related to the emotional exhaustion dimension. Of the 5 professional groups, psychiatric nurses experienced the highest level of depersonalization and psychiatrists had the lowest motivation to seek purpose in life. Results are discussed in terms of Frankl's existential theory. Finally, therapeutic implications of the reported findings (i.e., interventions) are briefly discussed.

Burnout refers to the experience of fatigue and frustration resulting from devoting oneself to a way of life that fails to produce expected rewards (Freudenberger & Richelson, 1980; Pines & Aronson, 1981). Maslach (1982) identified emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and low personal accomplishment as the three underlying dimensions that define burnout. Detrimental consequences of burnout include somatic complaints, decreased self-esteem, increased family conflicts, absenteeism from work, and a desire to leave the profession (e.g., Firth & Britton, 1989; Raquepaw & Miller, 1989).

Sources of burnout include organizational, interpersonal, and personal factors (Maslach & Jackson, 1982, 1984; Savicki & Cooley, 1987). Organizational factors typically consist of the following: lack of positive feedback about one's job performance, lack of autonomy and control in carrying out one's job, lack of participation in organizational decisions, conflicting role demands, ambiguity about one's job role, faulty management and supervision, and work pressure (see Savicki & Cooley, 1987). Interpersonal factors could include maintaining a heavy caseload, spending excessive time with clients, and working with unsupportive colleagues. Maslach and Jackson (1984) have found these latter factors to be clearly