



Moral Stress Among Frontline Workers Conducting Community-Based Drug Use Research

Celia B. Fisher

Marie Ward Doty University Chair in Ethics

Director Center for Ethics Education

Director HIV/Drug Abuse Prevention Research Ethics Institute

Professor Psychology

Fisher@Fordham.edu

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Lecture on Selecting Independent Variables for Research on Research Ethics

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Why Study Front Line Research Workers?

Definition: Front line research workers (FRW) are engaged in direct contact with participants

- FRW working in community based drug use research interact with individuals with multiple economic, health and social vulnerabilities
- Paucity of research on the emotional toll such interactions may have on FRW, its impact on their research activities, and factors that protect against or exacerbate these stressors.

Broad Goals of the Research

To identify and develop empirical measures to assess risk and protective factors associated with work-related attitudes and activities among FRW conducting community-based drug use research.

Which Koh's ERRE Category?

“Lay of the Land” Description of current practices and stakeholder perspectives

Preliminary Focus Group Study Led to Definition of Research Moral Stress

Feelings of anger, frustration, powerlessness and job burnout when morally appropriate actions cannot be implemented due to constraints imposed by role obligations and lack of organizational support.

Based on focus group comment and the nursing moral distress literature (e.g. (Corely et al., 2001; Jameton, 1984; Jameton, 1993)

Measures Created and Validated

- Research Moral Stress
- Research Moral Practice Dilemmas
- Research Commitment
- Research Mistrust
- Organizational Research Ethics Climate
- Organizational Support

Hypotheses

- FRWs who evidence strong research commitment and who report high levels of organizational support will experience lower levels of moral stress.
- FRWs who are distrustful of the research enterprise and who frequently grapple with moral practice dilemmas will have higher levels of moral stress.

How do you recruit frontline workers?

- 188 investigators identified through the NIH Research Portfolio Online Reporting Tool and the Clinical Trial Network databases
- **What was inclusion criteria?**
 - Direct contact with participants
 - Work within past 12 months

What additional questions determine if they are engaged in “frontline” research?

- Recruitment
- Screening, Enrollment, Intake
- Informed Consent
- Face-to-face Survey Administration
- Interviews
- Focus groups
- Harm reduction training
- focus groups
- Debriefing



What Personal Characteristics Might be Associated with Moral Stress?

- *Age*
- *Gender*
- *Ethnicity*
- *Education*
- *Personal history of drug use*
- *Community residence: Do you live in community in which research is conducted?*
- *Shared ethnicity, culture, or language with participants?*



What work related factors might be related to research moral stress?

- Number of years working as a frontline researcher
- Number of projects
- Full vs. P-T employment
- Income
- Financial security
- Health Insurance
- How often they met with their supervisor
- Participant vulnerabilities (housing, ethnicity, mental health, sex workers, MSM, IPV victims, PWID, with or at risk for HIV)
- Type of study (descriptive, prevention, RCT)



Major Findings Moral Stress

- Approximately 50% of FRW interviewed experienced some level of moral distress;
- Protective factors: Role commitment, organizational support and organizational procedures specifically addressed to research ethics; **age and frequency of meetings with supervisors.**
- Risk factors: Perceptions of research as exploitative (Research Mistrust) and moral practice dilemmas

Major Findings: Individual and Work Related Variables

- Provide the first description of the characteristics of individuals working as FRW in drug use and HIV related studies, including the fact that they are often required to navigate multiple roles
- Few demographic or work-related activities were associated with moral stress or moral practice dilemmas.... suggesting that these reactions are context rather than individually driven

Implications for Principal Investigators

- Lack of attention to the emotional toll of FRWs can threaten validity of research.
- Obtain first hand knowledge of the research community and draw on FRW expertise to enhance scientific validity and research integrity
- Set aside regular team sessions for debriefing and feedback