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RESEARCH PROPOSAL



SUPPORT & PROTECTION OF PARAMEDIC HEALTH & WELL-BEING

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> *"How do I stop thinking about a bad call? Well I think I work very closely with my partner and talk about it with him or co-workers that I can trust at work who will listen to me and not judge me. There are lots of people that will judge you for not being able to handle a call. There are few people at the station that I feel safe with."*
>
> *~ Emergency worker (Zettl,1999)*

Paramedics are often exposed to high levels of work stress. Such exposure, in turn, has significant repercussions on their health and performance at work.[1] Current research points to the importance of social support as a buffer in stressful situations.[2] The literature however, has also indicated that social support does not always have the desired effect.[3] In fact, despite a person's good intentions, some forms of social support can be inadequate and sometimes even harmful.

The objective of this study, which is part of a doctoral thesis (by A. Van Veeren), is to study the nature of different types of social support, their antecedents, and consequences amongst paramedics. More specifically, we would like to examine social support from a need satisfying versus thwarting perspective. In particular, a large number of international studies have demonstrated that the satisfaction of the three fundamental needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, leads to greater health and well-being. Moreover, satisfaction of these three needs is associated with increased motivation, work satisfaction, life satisfaction, as well as increased adaptation and resilience to stress. These empirical studies have further indicated that the positive effect of need satisfaction apply across life domains as well as within different relationships (e.g., supervisor-employee, teacher-student, physician-patient, and parent-child relationships).[4] Despite the numerous studies on social support, however, there has yet to be a study exploring the impact of need satisfaction and thwarting on the effectiveness of support. In line with the research on the fundamental needs, we believe that the more the support satisfies

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[1] *See for example, Carlier, Lamberts, & Gersons, 1997; Corneil, 1995; Follette, Polusny, & Milbeck, 1994; Marmar, et al., 1996 ; Regehr, Goldberg, Glancy, & Knott, 2002*

[2] *See for example, Baumeister, Dori & Hastings, 1998; Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Blais et al., 1995; Blais & Hess, 2003 ; Bowlby, 1971; Florian, Milulincer, & Bucholtz, 1995*

[3] *See for example, Charleton & Thompson, 1996; Coyne & Downey, 1991; Flannery, 1990; Fullerton, Ursano, Kao, & Bahartiya, 1992; Gold et al. 2000; Green et al., 1990; Hurrell, 1987; Hyman, 2004; Jerusalem et al., 1995; McCarroll, Ursano, Wright, & Fullerton, 1993; Smith et al., 1994; Solomon, 1995; Ullman & Siegal, 1994*

[4] *See for example, Blais et al., 1995; Blais, Sabourin, Boucher, & Vallerand, 1990; Butzel & Ryan, 1997 ; Leveillé, Blais, & Hess, 2003 ; Deci & Ryan, 2002*

the needs the more the person will feel in control and able to manage his/her problems (need for competence), free to choose his/her own way of coping with stress (need for autonomy), important, cared for and supported (need for relatedness). This, in turn, leads to increased recognition and endorsement of problems and distress. Individuals are thus better able to engage in the integration which is necessary for the management of problematic situations. These conditions subsequently lead to increased resilience and adaptation to stress.

The proposed study is part of a research program on the nature, determinants and the impact of leadership and authentic motivation led by Dr. Marc Blais. The studies conducted as part of the program have demonstrated that leadership styles which satisfy the three fundamental needs have a positive impact on employee adaptation, health, well-being and performance.[5] In particular, the positive effects arise as a result of supporting more authentic forms of work motivation. In addition, they occur as a result of the systemic effect of leadership style on subordinates, colleagues and superiors. These hypotheses have been validated in a variety of work settings. [6] For example, in a study with the Correctional Service of Quebec Léveillé (2007) found, amongst other things, that the leadership style of the supervisor influences colleague support style which in turn influences employee motivation, resilience to burnout, health and well-being.

To date, these hypotheses have not been tested amongst paramedics. The objective of this research is thus to examine the impact of leadership style (of the superior) and support style (from three different sources – i.e, superior, colleagues and important source outside work) on motivation, stress levels (chronic and acute), health and well-being of paramedics. More specifically, we postulate that leadership and support styles which satisfy the needs should positively influence motivation, emotional burnout, psychological distress, post-traumatic stress symptoms, work and life satisfaction, and physical health.

- METHODOLOGY & PROCEDURE -

We are looking for 400 participants to complete an online questionnaire which takes approximately 30-40 minutes to complete. Information regarding the questionnaire can be found in Table 1.

[5] *See for example, Blais & Hess, 2003; Levesque, Blais, & Hess, 2004; Léveillé, Blais, Hess, 2003; Riddle, Blais & Hess, 2003*

[6] *Léveillé, 2007*

Table 1. Questionnaire

Name of Factor	Scale	Psychometric Reliability
Social Support Style	*Social Support Inventory (Van Veeren et al., in press)*	Internal consistency = 0.70 to 0.92 Test-retest reliability = 0.57 to 0.75
Leadership Style	*Motivational Supervisory Style (Blais et al., 1991)*	Internal consistency = 0.75 to 0.79 Test-retest reliability = 0.65
Motivation	*Blais Work Motivation Inventory (Blais et al., 1993)*	*Adaptation and translation of the « Sources of Occupational Stress Scale » (Beaton & Murphy, 1993), Internal consistency = 0.95 & « Police Daily Hassles Scale » (Hart, Wearing & Headey, 1993; Hart, Wearing & Headey, 1994) Internal consistency = 0.77 to 0.93
Work Satisfaction	*Global Satisfaction at Work Scale (Blais, et al., 1991b)*	Internal consistency = 0.88 to 0.90 Test-retest reliability = 0.65
Chronic Stress	*Emergency Personnel Sources of Stress (Van Veeren & Blais, in press)*	Internal consistency = 0.63 to 0.91 Test-retest reliability = 0.59 to 0.75
Life Satisfaction	*Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985)*	Internal consistency = 0.79 to 0.92 Test-retest reliability = 0.89 to 0.94
Emotional Burnout	*Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach & Jackson, 1986)*	Illfeld Internal consistency = 0.94 to 0.96 Test-retest reliability = 0.60 NEO-FFI Internal consistency = 0.89
Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome	*Impact of Event Scale – Revised (Weiss & Marmar, 1997)*	Internal consistency = 0.72 to 0.73 Test-retest reliability = 0.70
Psychological Distress	*Illfeld Symptom Checklist (Illfeld, 1978)* *&* *NEO-FFI (Costa & McCrae, 1989)*	Internal consistency = 0.88 to 0.90 Test-retest reliability = 0.65
Physical Health	*Blais Physical Health Checklist (Blais et al., 1989a)*	Internal consistency = 0.63 to 0.91 Test-retest reliability = 0.59 to 0.75

- CONTRIBUTIONS -

We are proposing a study where the impact of support (provided by three sources – immediate supervisor, colleagues, and important person outside work) and leadership on health and well-being is examined from a new perspective. We believe, based on international research on the subject, that support and leadership styles which are oriented towards need satisfaction will lead to increased health and well-being as well as increased resilience and adaption to stress. Leadership and support styles which thwart the needs, on the other hand, will lead to increased levels of stress, health problems, decreased life and work satisfaction, and decreased motivation.

The results of this research will contribute to: (1) discovering the elements underlying effective and ineffective social support, and (2) learning, integration, long-term maintenance and transfer of knowledge with regards to adaptation and resilience to stress. Moreover, this research serves to explore the relationships between need-satisfying social support and leadership as well as their influence on health and well-being. Lastly, this research allows for the development of an innovative analysis grid which can serve to evaluate the effective and ineffective elements of social support.

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