

## Book Reviews

### Research Companion to Organisational Health Psychology

Antoniou, A. G., & Cooper, C. L. (2005)

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Reviewed by **Carina K. Y. Chan & R. Glynn Owens**

#### *Current work on work stress*

Health psychology is a field concerned with understanding human behaviour in the context of health and illness. Organisational health psychologists study the specifics of how the conditions and behaviours of work life - which for many of us accounts for a substantial percentage of our waking hours - impact on the health of individuals and their families. In this volume, the authors set out to understand, develop and promote the health of employees and their families using an organisational perspective.

The main purpose of this book, edited by A.G. Antoniou of the University of Athens and C. L. Cooper of Lancaster University, is to provide a collection of theoretical and empirical reviews and studies of some of the major topics in the field of organisational health psychology. The edited book consists of 42 chapters grouped into six sections which cover the conceptualisation and theoretical framework of organisational health psychology, issues in stress management, stress within specific populations, stress as a risk factor of health and well-being, professional burnout, and emotional intelligence. Each chapter has its specific focus; for example, providing theoretical

viewpoints of stress or investigating particular work-related risk factors. Although the book's title does not mention stress specifically, it will be clear from the section headings that this forms the major emphasis of the text; even the two sections (the first and last) which do not refer to stress in their headings are mostly dominated by this topic, with eight of the twelve chapters therein including stress in their titles. Most of the research reported was carried out in Europe and the USA with some conducted in Australasia. The chapters on ethnicity and work-family conflict are of particular relevance in the New Zealand context.

A variety of themes emerge from this volume. The most prominent of these is perhaps the understanding of stress, its conceptualisation, causes, management and prevention in the organisational context. The volume opens with chapters that provide theoretical, biological and physiological conceptualisations, some targeting factors that are major risk factors for stress in the work place, others focussing on individual differences in appraisal and coping processes.

More specific topics are exemplified by Miller and Travers's chapter, which draws our attention

to another demographic variable, that of ethnicity. The authors identify several ethnic-specific stressors such as ethnic discrimination, migration and acculturation, all of which may have a negative impact on health. The topic discussed is of particular relevance to New Zealand due to its diverse ethnic composition and the influx of immigrants during the past two decades. However, the authors seem to have focused comparisons of health indicators (e.g., blood pressure) between ethnic minorities and their counterparts and have not investigated how promoting adequate acculturation as well as maintaining one's own ethnic identity might have a positive influence on work stress. Our own research with New Zealand Chinese immigrants (Chan & Owens, 2006) suggests positive consequences of having a high sense of ethnic identity whilst at the same time adapting to the mainstream culture.

Nelson and Simmons's chapter offers a more positive approach to work stress - or what they term eustress -- focusing on the strengths rather than fixing weaknesses in organisations. The positive appraisals of meaningfulness and hope are important positive attitudes to promote eustress. The chapter highlights the significance of stress appraisals, rather than stressors per se, that are important in predicting positive psychological states. Nevertheless, as the authors have pointed out, the operationalisation of eustress needs to be further defined with an adequate theoretical framework. This would be an important research issue, as is the problem of identifying reliable indicators of eustress which may vary across different populations studied.

By contrast, Payne examines the adverse consequence of the main

stressors that contribute to strain (e.g. long working hours, role conflict, and role ambiguity as well as the psychological strain experienced at work). The following chapter by Shabracq, giving a brief overview of issues in leadership, reads as if it would benefit from a more in-depth sampling of the voluminous social psychology literature on the topic. Other chapters (Taris & Kompier and Weinberg) look at the demand-control model of Karasek (1979) relating job types to learning and strain, the claim that workers are likely to experience high levels of strain in high demand/low control jobs and with the potential problems thrown up by new technologies such as mobile 'phones and laptop computers. Much of the material, however, appears to provide only a two-dimensional approach (namely, demand and control) with little attention paid to such things as self-regulatory processes and individual differences.

The section on stress-management hovers at times between academic analysis and practical guidelines, with chapters considering stress-management procedures (Cartwright & Whatmore; Locke; Sutherland; and Zeidner), the prevention of injury and the maintenance of a healthy organisation (Leka, Griffiths & Cox; and Tetrick, Quick & Quick). The application of a public health model of primary, secondary and tertiary interventions to organisational stress provides a good backdrop for developing individual and/or organisational interventions.

The third section of the volume inspects specific groups of the population and is largely concerned with reports of specific groups who happen to have been subjects of study by the authors concerned. The groups include students in higher education, managers, veterinary surgeons and people in temporary positions. A further chapter (Oxenstierna, Westerlund, Ferrie, Hyde, Hagberg & Theorell) reports on the experience of the Swedish labour market during a period of upheaval using two theoretical models: the demand-control-support model (Karasek & Theorell, 1990) and the effort-reward imbalance model (Siegrist, 2002), noting the beneficial impact of work control and good social support and control at work on health.

An evident strength of this volume is its exploration of issues beyond those of the individual to consideration the health of the family, the society and even the nation when looking at work stress. Brough and O'Driscoll draw the link between work and family conflict and identified some consequences using MacEwen and Barling's (1994) work-family conflict model, although what appears to be a typographical error (p.356) implies that longer working hours were associated with women having, rather than not having, dependants to care for. The studies report that work-family conflict has become an inevitable stress and that both psychological distress and physical symptomatology are associated with increased conflict. Gender differences in work-family conflict pose another important issue in perhaps establishing policies for more flexible working arrangements for working women will help minimise the work stress they experience. A standardised and well validated measurement of work-family conflict is also essential to further research in this area.

Langan-Fox further addresses the effects of new technology and the global economy on the stress, health and well-being of employees, noting that whilst the influx of sophisticated technology is of value, it has its costs, such as when it encourages organisational restructuring and downsizing and thereby becomes another stressor to employees. The anxiety, stress and even anger elicited by economic and organisational changes in turn have maladaptive health outcomes. Other chapters (Siegrist, Falck & Joksimovic; Spielberger & Reheiser) point out the detrimental effects of effort-reward imbalance at work, noting that when employees are undergoing high psychological demands and low control and/or when the demand at work is high but the gain and reward is low, this can result in emotional exhaustion and burnout, and note that emotions play an important role in cardiovascular diseases (Miguel-Tobal & Gonzalez-Ordi). Given that research in psychoneuroimmunology has also found associations between emotions and immunity (e.g. Booth & Pennebaker, 2000; Herbert & Cohen, 1993) the negative emotions experienced

by employees as a result of occupational stress should not be overlooked. Apart from health outcomes, the behavioural outcomes such as absenteeism, productivity reduction are also discussed as adverse effects as a consequence of occupational stress.

The final chapter (Westman) in the section considers the impact of short business travel on the employee, family and organisation. As such, it possesses a very practical flavour. The author also provides a positive perspective on business trips (such as their educational benefits and exposure to the new) and identify several ways that organisations can help to reduce post-travel stress.

The extension of stress into burnout has, of course, been widely researched, and the penultimate section of the book includes nine somewhat variable chapters on the topic. Following fairly short introductions to the subject, the third chapter (Hallsten) reports on a national survey of burnout in Sweden, with disturbingly high percentages of respondents indicating either "burned out" or "worn out" status, and some interesting gender differences. Later chapters (Pines) on psychoanalytic perspectives on burnout, by contrast, stretch credibility somewhat --for example reporting that the burnout experienced by a nurse seen in therapy could be traced to a need for control stemming from childhood experiences of being required to wear heavier clothing than she wished.

A subsequent chapter (Shirom & Melamed) reviewing the impact of burnout on physical and mental health, while extensive in the material covered, suffers somewhat from a lack of integration. Nevertheless it provides a useful introduction to the topic.

The final section of the book, dealing with "emotional intelligence", perhaps relates less directly to stress than earlier chapters. The concept of emotional intelligence, and the validity of the juxtaposition of terminology with cognitive intelligence, is accepted perhaps less critically than one might ideally like, particularly given the theoretical and empirical difficulties associated with the latter, more well-validated concept. Again, however, the chapters can be seen as useful introductions.

## Using Homework Assignments in Cognitive Behavior Therapy

Kazantzis, Nikolaos, Deane, Frank P., Ronan, Kevin R. & L'Abate, Luciano (2005)

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reviewed by Sue Cowie

Aaron T. Beck, widely regarded as the "father" of cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT), insisted "Homework assignments constitute a crucial component of cognitive behaviour therapy". So it is timely that a book on homework and how to use it effectively has been written. The homework assignment that I had agreed to was to review this book. The reward was to keep the book on homework which I thought might come in handy

for teaching students about the use of homework, having tips on how to (collaboratively, of course) ensure that they (the overworked students) might complete their homework, might offer some new ideas for my clients and perhaps get something in print for the first time since 1986. So why did it take me so long to complete the homework assignment? Perhaps I could take a look at the book and find out.

This book is the second to arise from findings of *The Cognitive Behaviour Therapy Homework Project* where high-flying local Nikolaos Kazantzis (Massey University, Albany) is primary investigator on a team research project designed to clarify the mechanisms by which homework assignments produce their effects in therapy. The other editors of the book include Frank P. Deane, another local-made-good on the world stage who must be a young thing too because he still puts his intern experience down on his brag sheet (but maybe that's because it was Lake Alice) and Kevin Ronan who is also now in Australia. Luciano L'Abate provides the overseas cred. The chapter authors are a mix of familiar big names in CBT, other collaborators in the Homework project and practitioners.

The book provides a very readable summary of the findings related to the broad objectives of the project, separated in to four parts of the book.

Overall, the volume provides a diverse coverage of stress-related topics within the context of organisational psychology. Another valuable feature of the book is the inclusion of a broad variety of studies carried out within different subdomains and levels of organisational psychology. However, most chapters cover a few studies conducted in specific countries or on target populations and most of the cited studies are cross-sectional. This volume highlights the multidisciplinary nature of organisational psychology and suggests how organisational psychology can be integrated into other areas of psychology and public health.

The book also indicates many important lines of future research in organisational health psychology, providing a valuable and unique overview of most of the important issues where research can be advanced. It should be of value to advanced students and professionals alike in the fields of health and organisational psychology.

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Part 1 is a surprisingly readable summary of the theory and empirical foundations behind CBT homework that includes concise summaries of both behavioural and cognitive foundations. Having this understanding, I think, allows practitioners to think more creatively about the use of homework. I also think that in recent times training in behavioural concepts has been relegated to just developing a kite of techniques that assist in gaining a cognitive shift and this book usefully places a stronger emphasis on the contribution of behavioural theory. Any Clinical Psychology or Applied Behaviour Analysis student would appreciate and benefit from the clear summary of the behavioural and cognitive principles that are relevant for all therapy not just homework.

Part 2 presents strategies, techniques, and sample assignments tailored for special populations, including adults, children, couples, and families and Part 3 covers homework for specific problems areas from depression and anxiety to sexual problems, delusions and hallucinations and borderline traits. These chapters are clearly aimed at practitioners and offer some useful ideas for tailoring the homework to the specific issues related to each group. These sections provide good examples to demonstrate the practice and utility of the model of practice that is described in Part 4.

Part 4 provides a guiding model of practice in effective use of homework. Three steps are highlighted; Review, Design, Assign. At each step there is guidance regarding the practice issues with useful ongoing "Quick Reference" summaries of the main points. The model is clearly consistent with the principles of cognitive therapy, for instance emphasising the collaborative approach. I believe a strength of the model is its emphasis on the role of therapist factors in enhancing use of homework, something that is still a relatively new process for cognitive therapy literature. This primary focus of the section would be useful for all of us to review from time to time but would be particularly useful for new therapists or those hesitant or ambivalent about the use of homework. I always get a bit titchy though, about

using the word "assign" which infers a directive approach rather than the collaborative discussion and agreement recommended. This may be mere semantics, but semantics concern meanings, so I always change it in my practice to "agree on".

The model details ways to ensure that the homework is client-focused, relevant to the therapy goals and consistent with the conceptualisation, all in accord with the cognitive model. It was reassuring to read that non-completion of homework was a common experience for therapists in their study and I liked the book's sensible approach to this. Failures in therapy are definitely the most interesting things to me and they are definitely the stories that keep my students awake, with excellent learning to be gained.

All in all I think the model is soundly based, practical and a good advance on Beck's original description of integrating homework into cognitive therapy. I think it is a useful framework for introducing new therapists to the use of homework and for us oldies to brush up on our practice.

I had a mixed reaction to the middle chapters. There was a lot of repetition of the basic principles if you read one chapter after another. Over-learning is one of those behavioural strategies that should only be applied to pleasurable things like eating chocolate and netball (you thought I was going to say sex). Many of the issues around homework were generally the same as would be found using any CBT approach with the population or problem. I think at times it would have been more meaningful to read about homework as a part of the whole therapy process.

I was really hoping I would get some new ideas of things my clients can do for homework but that's not really what the book provides and probably not realistic. The best chapters were the ones where clients might have more restraints around the use of homework and some useful clinical tips could be gained; OCD and Borderline probably took the prize, as you might imagine.

So in terms of why it took me so long to write the review; I got stuck in the middle chapters. Normally, I like

the practical application more than the theory, but this book had the opposite effect on me. The introductory chapters and those presenting the model for practice and conclusions -- in fact anything that Dr Kazantzis had a part in writing-- are very readable and you will find ideas and understandings that will be useful in your practice. With the Specific Populations and Problems chapters that form the bulk of the book I'd recommend that you just pick and choose the ones of special interest. So in reviewing how my homework assignment went I'd say the "design" step went fine but I needed to spend a bit more thought on the "assign" step where you focus on how the activity will be completed.

So all in all, this book is a useful update and very practical model for using homework and to give Aaron Beck the last word; "I highly recommend this volume to all cognitive therapists".

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