

Relationship among Leader-member exchange(LMX), Burnout and Career Turnover Intention in Social Workers using SEM

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SEM을 이용한 사회복지사의 리더-구성원 교환관계와 소진 및 경력변경의도의 관계

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Abstract The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of LMX on the burnout and career turnover intention of social worker. For the research, burnout was consisted of emotional exhaustion (EE), depersonalization (DP) and diminished personal accomplishment (PA) by Maslach and Jackson's MBI. This study was analyzed 342 social workers in private social welfare organizations by survey. The results of this study were summarized as follows: The level of LMX perceived by social workers was a higher than medium. LMX was negatively related to the burnout and career turnover intention. LMX had a negative influence on the burnout and career turnover intention. Especially, EE and DP had a positive effect on the career turnover intention. This study finally discussed theoretical implications for future study and practical implications for LMX strategies on the results.

요 약 본 연구는 상사-부하관계가 사회복지시설의 종사자인 사회복지사의 소진과 경력변경의도에 미치는 영향을 살펴본 것으로, 민간 사회복지시설의 사회복지사 342명의 구조화된 설문자료를 분석하였다. 이를 위해 소진은 정서적 고갈(EE), 비인간화(DP), 성취감 감소(PA)로 구성된 Maslach와 Jackson의 MBI를 사용하였다. 구조방정식을 이용한 연구 결과, 사회복지사들이 인식한 LMX 수준은 5점 척도의 평균값 이상으로 나타났다. 또한 LMX는 소진과 경력변경의도에 부(-)적 영향을 미치고, 특히 소진의 구성요소 중 정서적 고갈과 비인간화는 경력변경의도에 정(+의 영향을 미치는 것으로 나타났다. 이러한 결과를 바탕으로 사회복지조직에서 활용할 수 있는 LMX 전략에 관한 실천적 함의를 논의하였다.

Key Words : LMX (leader-member exchange), Burnout, Career turnover intention

1. Introduction

Past research has suggested that supervisors play an important role in helping employees to deal with work-related stress and strain by providing them with emotional support [1-4]. Empirical studies on leadership have indicated that facilitative leadership has a positive

impact on service workers' satisfaction and commitment [5,6]. A good relationship between supervisors and service workers is a means to enhance workers' performance, in terms of the quality of each employee-customer interaction [7]. Leader-member exchange (LMX) can act as an 'antidote' to work strain, because subordinates with high LMXs are likely to receive emotional and social

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Received January 2, 2013

Revised (1st July 19, 2013, 2nd August 5, 2013)

Accepted August 7, 2013

support from their supervisors to cope with a stressful working environment [5,6,8,9]. It is possible that since service workers who have high quality exchange relationships with their supervisors may deal with work strain more effectively, they are less likely to experience burnout, and thus more likely to perform well. The results about LMX studies have shown LMX to be positively related to desired outcomes including increased job performance [10], contextual performance [11], motivation [12], job satisfaction [10,13], and organizational commitment [14].

Employees' burnout and career turnover intention are generally recognized to have a negative effect on organizational performance [15-17]. Job stress and burnout in the social work organizations has been a concern of both practitioners and researchers in recent decades. Burnout and its consequences cost employees and organizations. Previously, job burnout was closely related to turnover intentions or career turnover intention of social workers.

This study examines the nature of the relationship among LMX, burnout and career turnover intention in the social welfare organizations where burnout and turnover rates are high and reducing them is an important managerial issue. Based on the limited existing research conducted on social workers and few studies examining the variables proposed for this study, the following research questions were proposed;

Research question 1) What is the level of LMX, job burnout and career turnover intention perceived by social worker?

Research question 2) What are the relationships among LMX, job burnout and career turnover intention?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Leader-member exchange(LMX)

LMX refers to a work-related exchange relationship between subordinates and their immediate supervisor. The quality of relationships between supervisors and subordinates is often studied via LMX theory. LMX

model suggests that supervisors form differential relationships with their subordinates. These relationships range in quality from high to low. Subordinates in high quality exchanges have relationships with their supervisors characterized by emotional support and trust [12]. The benefits of high quality LMX relationships are numerous, including preferential treatment, increased job-related communication, differential allocation of formal and informal rewards, ample access to supervisors, and increased performance-related feedback [12,18]. Conversely, subordinates in low quality LMX relationships often experience the exact opposite; supervisors provide limited emotional support and trust and the subordinates receive few, if any, benefits outside the employment contract [10, 18].

LMX research categorized the relationship leaders could have with their followers into two groups: the in-group and out-group, more recently referred to as high-quality and low-quality exchanges, respectively [12,18]. Whether or not a relationship may be classified as high-or low-quality depends upon the level of confidence each party has in the other, their level of shared respect, and their perceptions of mutual obligation [12]. High-quality relationships have been described as partnering of colleagues, where individuals step beyond formal organizational roles to achieve desired goals [12]. In contrast, leaders and followers in low-quality relationships closely adhere to their respective organizational roles and do not step beyond those bounds [12,19].

2.2 burnout and career turnover intention

Burnout and career turnover are a severe psychological and physical syndrome that occurs in response to prolonged stress at work. It brings enormous costs to both organizations and individuals because it negatively impacts employees' job attitudes and leads to undesirable behaviors. Burnout is a psychological response syndrome with symptoms of emotional exhaustion and misanthropy, which often occurs in employees who are engaged in human-service occupations and professions, such as nursing, teaching, and social work. Maslach and Jackson [20] conceptualized burnout as a syndrome consisting of the following three components. Emotional exhaustion refers to a mental and physical tension and strain resulting

from job-related stressors. Depersonalization refers to a distancing of oneself from others and viewing others impersonally. Diminished personal accomplishment is a feeling of negative self-evaluation. Burnout leads to such undesirable outcomes as diminished job performance, job dissatisfaction, diminished customer satisfaction, low levels of organizational commitment, and increased absenteeism [21-23].

Turnover or career turnover is a natural phenomenon in organizations as long as it has functional effects. Because environmental and labor changes in social work agencies require permanent training, turnover can be a positive thing to increase staff skills, thereby providing a very diverse source of knowledge that comes with experience. However, in most cases, external turnover or career turnover among social workers has a negative impact on social work organizations. Social work professionals' excessive turnover causes several problems, from high financial costs to lack of service quality provided to clients.

2.3 Relationship among LMX, burnout and career turnover intention

Compared to those who have poor relationships with their leaders, followers in high quality exchanges tend to receive extensive social, political and economic supports, suggesting these individuals will not only be satisfied in their work roles, but will also go beyond their formal job requirements to justify and return such treatment [12,24]. These advantages for high quality LMX subordinates, which can be explained by social exchange theory, are likely to be related to positive outcomes. More explicitly, high quality relationships are associated with subordinates receiving increased access, communication, and rewards [18], all of which are related to elevated job satisfaction and performance (in the forms of task and contextual performance), and decreased turnover intentions [9,10].

Research on LMX has shown significant associations with many important work outcomes. For example, LMX is negatively related to turnover intentions, and positively related to organizational commitment, satisfaction with supervision, supervisory ratings of job performance [12]. When subordinates in a high-quality LMX relationship are satisfied with their job, the positive effects of the

relationship will be translated into employees' commitment to the organization and their willingness to stay with the organization. Ballinger et al. [25] reported that affective and cognitive reactions weakened the link between LMX quality and intention to leave. Henderson et al. [26] also highlighted that the relationships between within-group LMX and work performance and sportsmanship behaviors were mediated by perceptions of fulfillment. In addition, Chen and colleagues [27] reported that the links between LMX and objective and subjective in-role performance were partially mediated by subordinates' negative feedback-seeking behavior. Moreover, Sluss et al. [28] found that perceived organizational support mediates the relationship between LMX quality and organizational identification. Therefore, LMX should be inversely linked with the job burnout and among social workers.

Exhausted social workers are too tired to invest time and effort in their work. Depersonalization often signifies treating people like objects. For this reason, it is appealing to assume that emotional exhaustion will precede career turnover intention. Treating the people one works with in a depersonalized manner could be expected to go with career turnover intention. Employee who have little faith in themselves will also feel unable to help others [29]. Therefore, burnout will affect career turnover intention negatively.

3. Research Method

3.1 Data Collection and Participants

A convenience sample of 342 social workers participated in this study. The demographic characteristics of the respondents are shown in Table 1. Among the 342 respondents, 102 were male (29.2%), and 240 were female (70.2%). 34.2% of the participants' ages were between 30 and 39; 31.62% of the participants' ages were under 29; and 45 participants (13.2%) were over 50 years old. In terms of educational level, 56.7% of the respondents graduated from four-year university courses. 53.5% of the participants were married.

[Table 1] Demographic characteristics of the respondents

		n	%	Missing
Gender	Male	102	29.8	-
	Female	240	70.2	
Age (year)	20 ~ 29	108	31.6	1(.3)
	30 ~ 39	117	34.2	
	40 ~ 49	71	20.8	
	50 ≤	45	13.2	
Marital status	Not married	159	46.5	-
	Married	183	53.5	
Education	College	84	24.6	2(.6)
	Bachelors	194	56.7	
	Graduate course	62	18.1	
Certificate of qualification	1	136	39.8	2(.6)
	2 · 3	204	59.7	

3.2 Measurement

All the variables used in this study were operationalized with published scales that have been used in previous research. All the variables were measured with multiple items, and composite indicators were computed by calculating the average score across items. A five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5 (1 represents strongly disagree, 2 represents disagree, 3 represents neither disagree nor agree, 4 represents agree, and 5 represents strongly agree) was used.

3.2.1 Leader–Membership Exchange: LMX scale developed by Liden and Maslyn [30] was used to measure the quality of exchanges between participants and their supervisors. The scale consisted of 5 items. A sample item was “My supervisor would be personally inclined to use his or her power to help me solve problems in my work.”

3.2.2 Burnout: burnout was measured by a scale developed by Maslach and Jackson [20]. This scale has a three subscale (EE, PA and DP) and 9 items : three items representing exhaustion (e.g. ‘I feel used up at the end of the workday’), three items representing depersonalization (e.g. ‘I have become more cynical about whether my work contributes anything’) and three items representing diminished personal accomplishment (e.g. ‘I have

accomplished many worthwhile things in this job’). Because all of the items in this study were answered on a five-point Likert scale to achieve consistency, the MBI-GS was modified to use a five-point scale instead of the original seven-point scale. Exploratory factor analysis was carried out to prove the validity of the constructs. The factor analysis categorized, as expected, the three sub-scales like the original items. Data coding was done in such a way that a higher score indicated a higher burnout level. Internal consistency reliability scores were 0.87 for EE, 0.75 for PA and 0.71 for DP.

3.2.3 Career Turnover Intention: Career turnover intention was measured using the scale developed by Hom and Griffeth [31] as a part of the Michigan Organization Assessment Questionnaire. It operationally defines Career turnover intention by three single indicators: thinking of quitting, intention to quit, and intention to search for a new job. A five-point Likert scale was used. In this study, the reliability was .94.

3.3 Data Analysis

Descriptive statistical analyses and Pearson’s correlation analyses were carried out by using the SPSS (ver. 19.0k). Reliability analyses (Cronbach’s alpha) were conducted for the measures of all the major study variables. The structural equations modeling (SEM) were carried out with the AMOS package (ver. 19.0k) using the maximum likelihood estimation procedure.

To assess the fit of the analytic model to the data, several indices were considered. The Chi-square (χ^2) statistic measures the model fit to the sample used in the study. A good fit is generally understood to be a χ^2 with a probability greater than .05. Since the χ^2 is sensitive to sample size, the more robust root means square error (RMSEA) index, was assessed to determine fit. Two other indices use comparison to determine model fit. The normed fit index (NFI) indicates the proportion of the improvement in fit over the null or independence model where all correlations equal zero. The comparative fit index (CFI) controls for sample size and is the preferred index.

4. Result of Analysis

4.1 Descriptive statistics

Table 2 shows the means values and SDs of the major variables in this study. The level of the LMX had a higher than medium(mean=3.34, SD=.94). Also, the level of the overall burnout was 2.84(SD=.59) out of 5. It's a lower than medium. But, emotional exhaustion (mean=3.39, SD=.97) was very high than any other sub-scale of burnout, indicating that the respondents were experiencing emotional exhaustion. And the level of career turnover intention had a lower than medium (mean=2.72, SD=1.74). All of the variables had skewness and kurtosis values lower than 1 (in absolute value).

[Table 2] Descriptive Statistics of the major variable

Variable	Mean±SD	Min	Max	Skewness	Kurtosis
LMX	3.34±.94	1.00	5.00	.38	-.22
Burnout(total)	2.84±.59	1.11	4.44	.25	.08
Emotion exhaustion	3.39±.97	1.00	5.00	.43	-.29
Depersonalization	2.49±.80	1.00	5.00	.01	-.19
Diminished personal accomplishment	2.42±.71	1.00	4.50	.01	-.19
Career turnover intention	2.72±1.74	1.00	5.00	.16	-.86

4.2 Correlation Analysis

LMX was negatively related to the burnout ($r=-.36, p=.000$) and career turnover intention ($r=-.35, p=.000$). But, it was not statistically significant.

[Table 3] Pearson's correlation Matrix

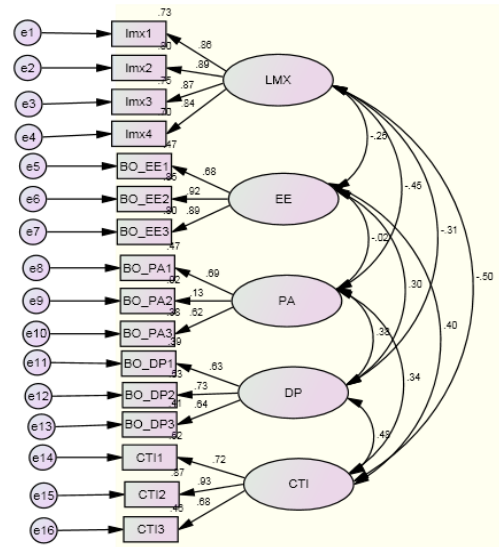
Variable	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥
① LMX	1					
② Burnout(total)	-.36***	1				
③ Emotional exhaustion	-.25***	.78***	1			
④ Depersonalization	-.24***	.47***	-.01	1		
⑤ Diminished personal accomplishment	-.34***	.74***	.29***	.21***	1	
⑥ Career turnover intention	-.35***	.48***	.36***	.19***	.34***	1

* p<.05, ** p<.01, *** p<.001

Social worker's burnout had a significantly positive correlation with career turnover intention. Furthermore, all factors of burnout showed positive correlation with career turnover intention: emotional exhaustion ($r=.36, p=.000$), depersonalization ($r=.19, p=.000$), diminished accomplishment ($r=.34, p=.000$), as indicated in Table 3.

4.3 Measure Model Analysis

A measurement model was estimated with confirmatory factor analysis through the use of the maximum likelihood estimation method for raw data. The χ^2 value of 327.51($p=.000$) was statistically significant. In the context of indices of absolute fit, the goodness-of-fit-index(GFI) were 0.92. The root mean square error of approximation(RMSEA) evinced a reasonable value of 0.08. Incremental fit indices included: Bentler's comparative fit index(CFI) (0.91), Bentler's normed fit index(NFI) (0.88), and Turkey-Lewis index(TLI) (0.92). The results indicated a reasonably good fit of the model with the data.



[Fig. 1] Measure Model Analysis

4.4 Construct Model Analysis

The results of the serial tested structural models relating the LMX, three burnout components and career turnover intention are summarized in Table 4. Six out of the seven structural paths between the constructs were statistically significant and they were also in the expected

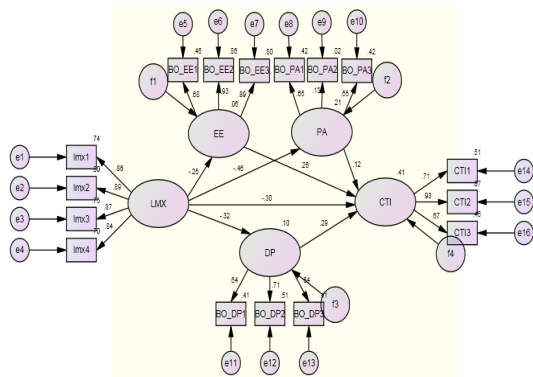
direction. The only non-significant path was the effects on career turnover intention from PA. The standardized parameter estimates of the research question model are depicted in Fig. 2.

[Table 4] Structural Paths

Variable	Estimate	SE	Standardized Estimate	C.R.(t)
LMX -- > DP	-.22	.05	-.32	-4.53***
LMX -- > EE	-.21	.05	-.25	-4.15***
LMX -- > PA	-.28	.05	-.46	-5.56***
LMX -- > CTI	-.31	.07	-.30	-4.36***
DP -- > CTI	.30	.09	.29	4.29***
EE -- > CTI	.31	.06	.27	4.62***
PA -- > CTI	.41	.12	.12	1.62

***p<.001

Although the χ^2 value of 357.54(p=.000) was statistically significant, the model fit was deemed acceptable, given the relatively large number of observed indicators for the constructs and the other indices(GFI=.93, RMSEA=.08, CFI=.90, NFI=.89, and TLI=.90).



[Fig. 2] Construct Model Analysis

5. DISCUSSION

In recent years, interest in the topic of burnout and career turnover have increased because we have begun to understand the significant negative impact that it has on employees, service client, and organizations [21-23]. The results of this study demonstrate relations among LMX, social workers' burnout and their career turnover

intention.

Detailed findings are discussed below.

First, the level of the LMX had a higher than medium. Also, the level of the overall burnout was lower than medium. But, emotional exhaustion was very high than any other sub-scale of burnout, indicating that the respondents were experiencing emotional exhaustion.

Second, LMX was negatively related to the burnout and career turnover intention. But, it was not statistically significant. Furthermore, burnout had a significantly positive correlation with career turnover intention.

Third, LMX significantly affected the level of social workers' burnout and career turnover intention. And social workers' burnout positively and significantly affected the career turnover intention.

The results suggest that when in-group subordinates are content with their jobs, the positive effects of high-quality LMX influence their attitudes and behaviour towards the organization, resulting in greater organizational commitment and reduced intention to leave. In fact, central to the leadership techniques are the support, feedback, and information enjoyed by high-quality LMX subordinates. Such techniques may help the subordinates to get a challenging and autonomous job as well as to enhance the level of self-efficacy, which accounts for an appealing job [32,33].

Compared to those who have poor relationships with their leaders, followers in high quality exchanges tend to receive extensive social, political and economic supports, suggesting these individuals will not only be satisfied in their work roles, but will also go beyond their formal job requirements to justify and return such treatment [29,33]. Indeed, the quality of the leader-follower relationship has been found to predict various positive work-related outcomes, including follower job satisfaction [8,12]. Subordinates in a high-quality LMX relationship are more likely to be liked and respected by their supervisor [34]. Hence, they will then tend to receive more resources and job-related support, such as training and career-advancement opportunities. Such resources and support may enhance subordinates' self-development and skill development, improve their work performance, and reduce their work pressure, consequently leading to reduce job burnout and career turnover.

Job burnout has an inverse influence on the

organizational behavior of social workers. It implies that by the increase of job burnout level, the level of organizational commitment and organizational citizenship behavior of these people would be reduced. Subordinates may enjoy challenging and highly autonomous jobs if they have the support of their supervisor. Given a high degree of job autonomy, subordinates may regard themselves as being responsible for their own work actions, and will be more likely to experience intrinsic rewards as a result [32]. Considering the factors that influence the degree of burnout, favorable working conditions such as reasonable work hours and organizational support for an autonomous and innovative culture must be adopted. When overload becomes chronic, there is little opportunity to rest and recover. At the same time, because job dissatisfaction also causes burnout, strategies for building good relationships with co-workers and supervisors, suitable work assignments, promotion opportunities and higher salaries should be implemented [30].

This study has certain limitations. First, data for the analysis were collected using subjective scales and self-reports that can distort the correlation among constructs. And self-reported data is subject to common method variance. Second, as we used a cross-sectional design, we could not arrive at a definitive conclusion about causality. Third, the sample in this study was taken from a Kangwon-do, thereby limiting the generalization of the findings.

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<Research Interests>

Social Welfare Policy and Administration, Social Law