

# ORGANIZATION OF WORK IN ASSISTED LIVING: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE WELL BEING OF UNLICENSED DIRECT CARE WORKERS

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**Purpose/Aims:** The purpose of the study was to identify whether organizational factors, and/or work place stressors are associated with level of stress responses in unlicensed direct care workers employed in Assisted Living Residences (ALRs).

**Background:** Unlicensed workers (nursing aides, personal care aides or resident assistants) provide the majority of assistance and care to older adults residing in ALR's. Despite the importance of ALR's in prolonging independent living among the elderly, few studies have examined the occupational health challenges faced by unlicensed workers who provide direct care in these settings. An ecological model was utilized for the systematic identification and investigation of multilevel factors contributing to occupational stress of unlicensed caregivers in ALRs.

**Methods:** This descriptive study examined associations between organizational factors, work place stressors and stress responses of unlicensed direct care workers (N=43) employed in ALRs (N=6). Data were collected through standardized questionnaires administered by trained interviewers. Measures of sample demographics, organizational practices and work stressors were compared with measures of burn out, psychiatric distress, work-related injuries and job commitment. Analysis included simple descriptive statistics, correlation analysis and analysis of variance.

**Results:** Overall, the unlicensed direct care workers had high levels of emotional exhaustion, psychiatric distress and work-related injuries. Supervisory and human resource practices were significantly associated with direct care workers reports of role competence and job commitment. Additionally, work-level stressors related to workloads and interpersonal demands were significantly and

consistently linked with reports of increased emotional exhaustion. Finally, the emotional work of providing care to residents with dementia-related behaviors and providing support to families was the most frequently reported work stressor. The most distressing behaviors were related to the memory impairment and depression of the residents.

**Implications:** The findings support the critical importance of including consideration of organizational and work-level stressors when developing strategies to reduce emotional exhaustion, injuries and other distress in unlicensed workers.

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