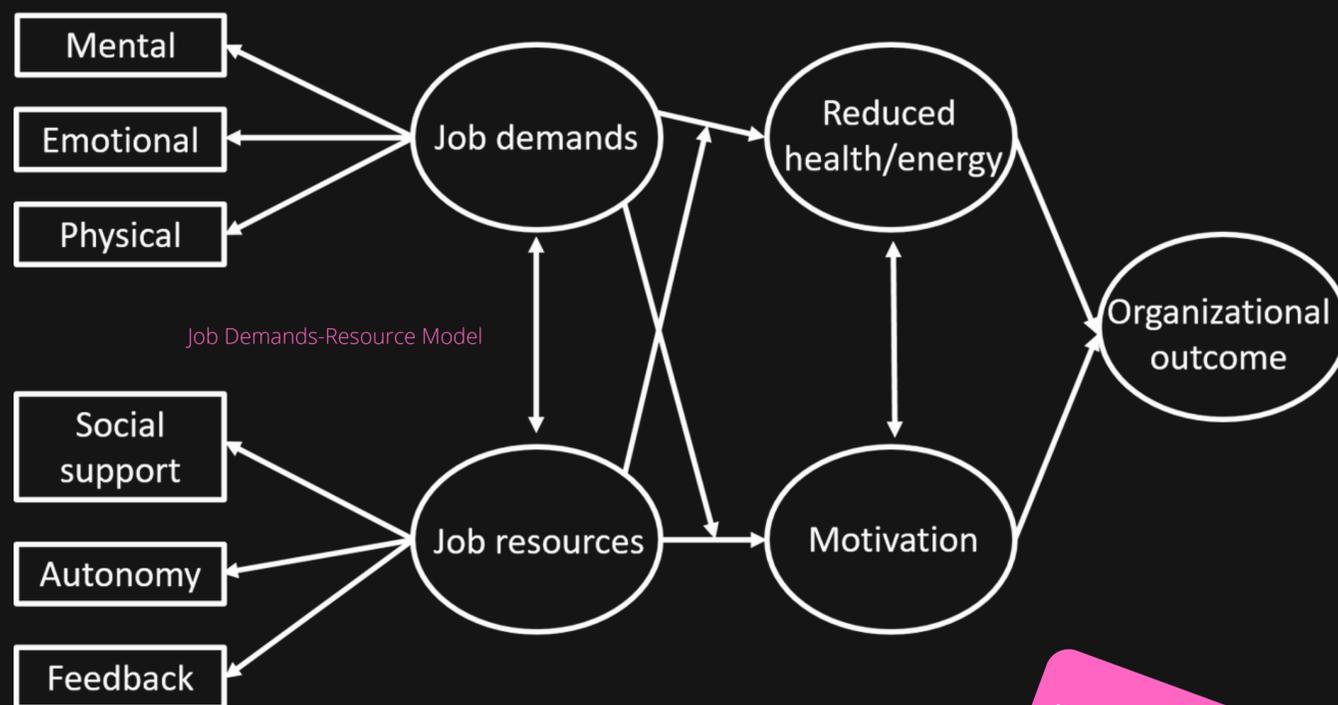


Staff experience working with older people in congregative supportive living with harm reduction - implications for training and practice

Nixon L MD CCFP (COE) FCFP, Punungwe FM DrPH, Nuique K, Sampson M MA, Kelly M MBBCh PhD CCFP

The Challenge

Older people who use substances are excluded from aged-care settings by abstinence-only drug policy, prompting calls for integration of harm reduction (HR) and geriatric care. Evidence from other harm reduction settings suggests that staff working in harm reduction may be vulnerable to vicarious trauma and staff burnout. The aim of this study was to explore staff experiences of working in a harm reduction setting with older people who use substances to help inform staff training needs and supports.



Methods

Qualitative interview study analyzed thematically, informed by the Job Demands-Resource Model.

Results

	Personal	Organizational
Resources	Varied life experiences <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • personal • educational • work Fulfilling role	Job flexibility Work benefits <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sick days • counselling Supportive work relations
Demands	Health concerns <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • emotional burden • mental health • physical health 	Unpredictable resident needs Poor communication <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • inconsistent rules (between staff) • different staff provide different messages to residents • undervalued voices Physical work environment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lack of space and privacy • smoking

"No, I like that it's different. I mean it's hard to get bored, you know".

"When a resident says something to me like... 'you're very understanding... when I hear those things, I rejuvenate so fast'."

"Sometimes when I get home ... if it was ... a challenging day, you know, where there's lots of upset and residents yelling at you -I'm so completely exhausted, or sometimes I just needed to have a little bit of a cry ..."

"But the harm reduction training, I think that that should be just as required as first aid ..."

Practice Points

- Staff were strongly personally motivated to work in HR. This was reinforced by a sense of collegiality and when recognised by residents.
- Lack of co-ordinated communication had a negative impact on staff morale.
- Providing baseline HR training for ALL staff and ongoing via staff training in HR has potential to reduce staff burnout and improve organizational identity and sense of purpose.

