EFFECTIVENESS OF STRESS MANAGEMENT WORKSHOP IN REDUCING STRESS AND INCREASING APTITUDE FOR BUILDING SOCIAL CAPITAL

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Abstract

of

EFFECTIVENESS OF STRESS MANAGEMENT WORKSHOP IN REDUCING STRESS AND INCREASING APTITUDE FOR BUILDING SOCIAL CAPITAL

by

Ameshia Shameen Gabriel

This study examined the effectiveness of a stress management workshop in reducing stress and increasing the aptitude for building social networks. The workshop used relaxation techniques, de-stressing to prepare oneself to understand the context of situational stress, importance of awareness, explicit building of social networks within groups, and applied stress management techniques to decrease participant stress and increase aptitude for establishing social networks. Secondary data from the 22 workshop participants was analyzed and the following conclusions were reached from the study. All participants scored moderate to high level of stress as indicated by the scores on the stress checklist. The study findings indicated that there was a medium negative correlation between the stress scores and the participants’ rating of the usefulness of the stress management workshop. Participants perceived the workshop as effective with a mean workshop effectiveness of 4.1818. Participants were informed that a score of 1 means not at all helpful and a score of 5 means very helpful.
The post workshop scores on the social capital measurement tool indicate that average social capital building capacity increased although it wasn’t statistically significant. Further study with large samples is needed to study this highly relevant relationship between stress and social capital building capacity.

___________________________, Committee Chair
Jude M. Antonyappan, Ph.D.

______________
Date
DEDICATION

For my dad Paul K. Gabriel who taught me about unconditional love, my husband Ben Arthur who makes me feel safe and supported, and my little thesis partner, Benjamin Gabriel Arthur, who was there all along. I would also like to thank my thesis advisor Dr. Jude Antonyappan for being such a great support and resource in this journey.
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Chapter 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Purpose of Study

The purpose of the study is to measure the effectiveness of a stress management workshop in reducing stress and increasing the aptitude for social capital building. Study questions addressed in this study included the impact of stress management workshops in reducing stress and the impact of stress management workshops in social capital building. The study examined whether a short term stress management workshop effectively could reduce stress and increases social network building capacity. In order to facilitate this examination this researcher used secondary data obtained from a short term stress workshop which was part of a larger study conducted by Dr. Antonyappan and Dr. Eggman, faculty members from the division of Social work. The data obtained from this workshop was given to this researcher for analysis. The researcher analyzed the data to examine the research question stated above and meet the purpose of the study.

It is important to understand the effectiveness of short term stress intervention for two key reasons. According to the American Institute on stress (2001) stress levels have steadily risen and are expected to continue in an increasing pattern (Pierceall, 2007).
This is significant because stress has been linked with serious medical maladies such as impaired brain functioning. Secondly, having established that stress is a threat to public health it is important to research the effectiveness and feasibility of such a cost effective intervention as a short term workshop in reducing stress.

The goal of analyzing this data is to determine the effectiveness of short term intervention to reduce stress and increase social capital building. If it is determined that a short term intervention effectively reduce stress it can make stress management tools more accessible for those most in need, lower socioeconomic groups, minorities, and those without quality health insurance. When taking into consideration the research done by Orem, Petrac, and Bedwell (2008), this access can contribute to increased citizen contribution. Orem, Petrac, and Bedwell found that chronic stress negatively affects memory, attention span, coping resources, problem situation appraisal, academic achievement, and IQ. In addition to possibly contributing to increased citizen contribution, this access may decrease expenditures on national health. This assertion is made using research from Mcewen (1998) that says stress contributes to an array of physical impairments and illness.

It is important to note that there has been extensive research done concerning stress as well as social networks. This research is valuable in contributing to the new research area this study ventures to make contributions in. This research is unique because it is informed by past knowledge but takes the research a step further in studying the interaction of stress and social networks. In addition, this research looks
at, the less studied, effectiveness of intervention. The discovery of an effective short term intervention will allow more stress management resources to be accessible to those in need. This is also a significant contribution to medical, social work, and educational research because the prevention of stress contributes to the prevention of several medical maladies, mental health issues, and obstacles in educational achievement. Because of the scant research on the compiled effect of stress and social networks, and the more limited research knowledge on the effectiveness of short term intervention this research will be a valuable contribute to the current body of knowledge. Future researchers are encouraged to continue studies using this knowledge as a part of their theoretical basis.

Background of the Problem

There are many definitions of stress. According to Lazarus (1966) stress arises when one appraises a situation as threatening or otherwise demanding and does not have an appropriate coping response. Holmes and Rahe (1967) define stress as the changes that affect a person’s life whether the change is welcomed or unwelcome. Selye (1976) defined stress using the term general adaptation syndrome. According to this definition of stress, a person goes through three stages when coping with pressure.
The first stage is fight or flight, the second is resistance, and if the stress is present for a prolonged period then the last stage, exhaustion, will be entered. A stressor, which is the cause of stress, is defined as a perceived threat and structural constraints that negatively affect a person’s capacity to respond (Magaya, Anser-Self, & Schreiber, 2005).

Stress has been studied at length and the negative effects of stress are numerous. Stress affects every facet of human life. A person’s physical, mental, and social well-being can all be affected. Researchers and doctors alike have known for some time now that stress can be detrimental to the immune system, metabolism, and cardiovascular system (McEwen, 1998 as cited in Orem, Petrac, & Bedwell, 2008; Pritchard, Wilson, & Yamnitz, 2007). Stress also takes a toll on the brain. Stress can stunt and/or damage existing brain structures. Chronic stress negatively affects memory, attention span, coping resources, problem situation appraisal, academic achievement, and IQ (Orem, Petrac, & Bedwell, 2008; Giancola, Grawitch, & Borchert, 2009; Hopko, Crittendon, Grant, & Wilson, 2005; Robotham & Julian, 2006). Included in areas affected negatively by stress is a person’s social well-being. Someone who is under severe or chronic stress is less likely to create and/or maintain supportive relationships.

The detriments stress cause contributes greatly to the cyclical nature of stress. It is imperative and at the same time difficult to deal with stress because at a certain stress level, stress can begin to perpetuate itself. Stress operates such that a person
under stress may neglect to build and sustain healthy relationships. A healthy relationship, or social support, is an excellent way to combat stress. Because stress causes many to lose these ties more stress is allowed to enter the subject’s life unhindered. In addition, severe stress in the workplace, at home, or school may cause medical problems which in turn cause more stress in addition to financial problems and the cycle, many times, is continued in this way.

Having taken notice of the increasing role stress plays globally, researchers have focused on tools of effective stress management. Out of the research the most supported techniques are social networks (House, Landis, & Umberson, 1988 as cited in Kim, Sherman, & Taylor, 2008), social problem solving (Chang & D’Zurilla, 1996; D’ Zurilla & Sheedy, 1991 as cited in Baker, 2003), and integrative intelligence (Pau et al, 2004; Montes-Berges & Augusto, 2007).

There is a vast body of research to support the effectiveness of social networks in alleviating and/or preventing stress. Social support can have a buffering and/or main effect. The stress buffering effect asserts that social networks provide the resources needed to deal with stress and/or these social networks reduce the perceived importance of the stressor (House, 1981; Panzarella, Alloy, & Whitehouse, 2006).
This reduction in perceived stress allows individuals to feel less stressed and therefore suffer less stress induced maladies. The main effect of social networks states the inclusion in a social network helps to prevent stress from arising and has a generalized beneficial effect (Cohen, 1985). Though some research asserts main effect over buffering effect or vice versa there is no argument that social networks indeed reduce stress.

Looking at stress and social networks from another angle it has been shown that the absence of quality social networks can be a stressor. In research by Weckwerth and Flynn (2006) it was reported that much of the stress experienced by both women and men was due to inappropriate and/or inadequate social support. This lack or non existence of quality social support is also linked to adjustment problems, school problems, aggressive behavior (Anan & Barnett, 1999 as cited in Hagan, Myers, & Mackintosh, 2005), depression (Kliewer, Lepore, Oskin, & Johnson, 1998; Lepore et al., 1996 as cited in Hagan, Myers, & Mackintosh, 2005), burnout (Weckwerth & Flynn, 2006), illness and drug and alcohol abuse (Miczo, N., Miczo, A., Johnson, 2006), and higher levels of psychopathology (Fondacaro and Heller, 1983; Pierce, Frone, Russell, Cooper, & Mudar, 2000 as cited in Ham Hayes, & Hope, 2005).
A separate body of research touts the effectiveness of social problem solving and coping skills to combat stress. According to several researchers effective social problem solving lowers stress and partially mediates the link between stress and negative psychological functioning (Chang & D’Zurilla, 1996; D’Zurilla & Sheedy, 1991 as cited in Baker, 2003; Chang, D’Zurilla, & Sanna, 2007).

Another camp exalts the effectiveness of emotional intelligence. Those individuals that were reported to have higher emotional intelligence more often chose an appropriate coping strategy and were reported to have lower levels of stress (Pau et al, 2004; Montes-Berges & Augusto, 2007). Chan (2005) also asserts that there is a mediation effect of emotional intelligence on psychological distress.

There is much research and many groups of researchers that lend evidence to the effectiveness of one strategy or the other. Disappointingly, no group mentions how these proven stress reducing strategies would work in conjunction.

Through this disjointed view of stress management several workshops were developed. Three such workshops are detailed in this study. The stress management workshops focused mainly on enhancing cognitive behavioral ability and understanding stress. Each of these workshops was found to be effective in some way. The reason these workshops were effective is a matter of debate. Some believe the effectiveness of these workshops was due to the education the workshops provided, others believe it was due to the unintended outcome of participants’ increased social network.
This research looks to begin to fill the knowledge gap concerning the effectiveness of these workshops. The explicit difference between this research and research before it is that this research will be done using an integrative view of the stress coping strategies discussed. In taking account the benefits of each strategy these variables can be properly monitored and measured to produce a clearer view of why or why not an intervention is effective.

Statement of Problem

There is an increasing role of stress in the lives of people. The problem researched in this study is the effectiveness of the stress management workshop in reducing stress and increasing the aptitude for establishing social networks. In accordance with the current body of research this researcher hypothesizes that a short term stress intervention and social capital building workshop can lessen the level of stress and increase the capacity for social network building with participants. Stress increases in a cyclical self perpetuating cycle. Those who have less resources and coping capacity, when faced with a challenging situation, become stressed. The stress in this person's life, many times, decreases the number of quality social connections and other stress fighting resources one has. The lessening of one's resources compounds a person’s feeling of helplessness, thus increasing the amount of stress being experienced. The intervention seeks to use education, explicit building of social networks within groups, and applied stress management techniques to decrease participant stress and increase aptitude for establishing social networks.
Definition of Terms

The definition of several key terms is important for this study. For the purpose of this study terms will be defined as follows;

Stress- A physical response that arises when one appraises a situation as threatening or otherwise demanding and does not have an appropriate coping response (Lazarus, 1966).

Social Networks- person or persons that the one identifies as someone who may be depended upon in time of stress or need.

Stress management-the ability to use one's self and resources to effectively cope with stress.

Oppression Anxiety- chronic stressor experienced by persons in society just by virtue of their membership in a non dominant marginalized group.

Integrative Intelligence- The harmonious functioning of stress management competencies that include social problem solving, coping strategies, and emotional intelligence.

Emotional Intelligence-the ability to identify, regulate, and improve emotion as well as motivate oneself and handle relationships (Goleman, 1995).
Social Problem Solving—a general coping strategy that can mediate and/or moderate psychological stress by enabling a person to better manage stress and his/her emotional response to stress (D’Zurilla & Sheedy, 1991)

Stress management workshop—an intervention designed to furnish participants with the tools to better deal with stress.

Theoretical Framework

There are several main theories that influence this study, Selye’s theory of stress, systems/ecological theory, Bandura’s theory of self efficacy, and Antonovsky’s theory of sense of coherence. Each of these theories contributes the theoretical framework differently.

Selye’s theory of stress.

Selye’s theory concerning stress is the General Adaption Syndrome (GAS). General Adaption Syndrome describes a three stages response to a stressor. The first stage of stress response is the alarm reaction stage. This stage is a physical response to an acute stressor. The second stage is the resistance stage. This stage comes in effect when one is exposed to a stressor for a prolonged period of time. A low level of the physical stress response experienced in stage one is maintained throughout this stage. The third stage is the exhaustion stage. In this stage one is physically unable to continue to respond to the stressor. After prolonged periods of time responding to stress one’s experiences adrenal exhaustion and a weakened immune system among other physical and psychological consequences.
Selye’s GAS theory is a cornerstone of this study for several reasons. Selye is the pioneer of stress and the study of stress. All other stress research is influenced by this work and Selye’s original work is still widely utilized. In addition to the magnitude of influence this theory has had in stress research, the stages of GAS are significant to the assumptions of this research. This research operates under the assumption that stress debilitates one from actualizing their maximum potential. The consequences of the second and third stage of GAS reiterate this sentiment.

*Systems/ecological theory.*

The systems/ecological perspective also contributes largely to the theoretical framework of this research. The systems/ecological framework’s primary focus is human interactions with the environment. These interactions are divided into three groups; interpersonal, intrapersonal, and environment. Interpersonal refers to the happenings that occur within self, intrapersonal refers to the interactions that happen between self and others considered close to self, and environment refers to interactions between self and community. Each of these interactions is equally important.

Some common assumptions of the systems/ecological perspective are that an interdependent relationship exists between persons and environment as well as between intrapersonal and interpersonal factors. Other assumptions include that human beings have to be understood within the context of their environment and that humans are goal oriented and strive toward competence.
This framework highlights the social capital component of this research. The systems/ecological perspective includes interactions outside of self as important components necessary to understand the whole person. It also asserts that humans are goal oriented beings that must be understood within the context of their environment. These foundational factors complement this research's understanding of the connection between social capital and stress management capacity. That is that increased social capital increases stress management capacity.

*Bandura's theory of self efficacy.*

The final contributing theory to this research is Bandura’s theory of self efficacy. Self efficacy is “the belief in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations” (1995, p. 2). Self efficacy influences how we think, behave, and feel. This has an effect on one’s psychological states, behavior, and motivation. According to Bandura, self efficacy is developed through mastery experiences, social modeling, social persuasion, and psychological responses. Briefly explained, mastery experiences are when one performs tasks successfully, social modeling is witnessing others successfully complete tasks, social persuasion is one being persuaded by another that s/he has adequate capacity to be successful, and psychological responses are one’s responses and reactions to situations. What Bandura identified as builders of self efficacy are closely related to the resources of stress management outlined in this study. Social modeling and social persuasion are forms of social support. If one has a social network of successful and encouraging
people one is more likely to deal with stress effectively. The concepts of mastery experiences and psychological responses relates closely to social problem solving skills. Social problem solving skills are an individual’s ability to appraise, approach, and resolve a problem. This ability largely depends on past success in similar challenging situations as well as how a person reacts to a stressful situation. The close relation of terms implies that problem solving was influenced by Bandura’s self efficacy theory.

_Antonovsky’s sense of coherence._

Antonovsky theorized as to why some are negatively and detrimentally affected by stress and others seem to be less affected and more resilient toward the same level stressor. Antonovsky concluded that the variance in the ability to cope with stress was due to one’s access to generalized resistance resources (GRR) (Antonovsky, 1979); examples of resources include money, ego strength, and social support. Antonovsky stated that access and successful utilization of GRR leads to the development of a disposition essential to stress coping, sense of coherence (SOC).

Sense of coherence was defined by Antonovsky as one’s feeling that life is structured, predictable, explicable, and meaningful and that one has the necessary resources to meet life’s challenges (Antonovsky, 1987). Sense of coherence logically relates to this study’s hypothesis about the need to increase coping resources such as social support and others.
Each of the theories outlined above contribute an essential component to the framework upon which this study operates. Selye’s theory of stress, systems/ecological theory, Bandura’s theory of self efficacy, and Antonovsky’s theory of sense of coherence all have distinct contributions to this framework and the sum of these theories forms a strong foundation for the current study.

Assumptions

The assumption of this research is that stress debilitates a person from actualizing their highest potential. This assumption naturally leads to the questions what can be done about this debilitating circumstance. This leads to the second assumption of this research that stress management workshops can reduce the levels of stress experienced by the participants. It is also an assumption that the effects of a stress management workshop can be measured.

Limitations

The limitations of this study lye in the type of data analyzed. The data used is secondary data obtained from a small population sample. All data has been obtained through a short term stress intervention workshop. All participants of this workshop are students of Sacramento State University. In addition, the manner of data is a one group pre test post test. Because of these circumstances the knowledge obtained from this study is low in both internal and external validity. The findings cannot be highly generalized because of the non random sampling.
Still this information will be reasonably applicable to other students at universities similar in demographic and characteristics as the university used in this study. Furthermore, the findings in this study will work to generate other research questions and support future hypothesizes.
Chapter 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This literature review is to explore the effectiveness of short term intervention on stress management. While exploring the literature on stress and stress management several themes emerged. These themes are as follows; positive versus negative stress, debilitating effects of stress, oppression anxiety, effective stress management encompassing the subthemes social support, social problem solving, and coping strategies and integrated intelligence, and the role of stress management workshops in improving functioning. Each of the themes and subthemes proved crucial in exploring stress and stress management.

Positive versus Negative Stress

There are many definitions of stress. According to Lazarus (1966) stress arises when one appraises a situation as threatening or otherwise demanding and does not have an appropriate coping response. Holmes and Rahe (1967) define stress as the changes that affect a person’s life whether the change is welcomed or unwelcome. Selye (1976) defined stress using the term general adaptation syndrome. According to this definition of stress, a person goes through three stages when coping with pressure.
The first stage is fight or flight, the second is resistance, and if the stress is present for a prolonged period then the last stage, exhaustion, will be achieved. A stressor, which is the cause of stress, is defined as a perceived threat and structural constraints that negatively affect a person’s capacity to respond (Magaya, Anser-Self, & Schreiber, 2005).

However stress is defined, it is an integral part of the human experience. Korthage (2003) asserts that life’s challenges are innately stressful and attempts to avoid all stress would lead to a boring existence (as cited in Pierceall & Keim, 2007). Stress can work productively or counter productively toward human goals and health. Ideally, stress acts as an early warning signal. Consequently, when a person feels stress he or she becomes acutely aware of the identified danger and reacts to the stress by preparing to cope with the stressor. Another positive possibility for the productive use of stress was defined by Selye. Selye (1975) differentiated between bad stress, distress, and good stress, eustress. Eustress is the optimal amount of stress needed to drive achievement without adversely affecting performance.

*Debilitating Effects of Stress*

Having distinguished between good stress and bad stress this literature review is concerned with the research on distress, from here on to be referred to as stress. Though it is clear that stress can be good, the majority of stress research has been focused on negative stress.
Stress has been studied at length and the negative effects of stress are numerous. Stress affects every facet of human life. A person’s physical, mental, and social well-being can all be affected.

The physical consequences of chronic stress vary from mild to severe. Stress can cause something as minor as a headache or as major as failures in the immune system. Researchers and doctors alike have known for some time now that stress can be detrimental to the immune system, metabolism, and cardiovascular system (McEwen, 1998 as cited in Orem, Petrac, & Bedwell, 2008; Pritchard, Wilson, & Yamnitz, 2007).

Related to both physical and mental capacity stress also takes a toll on the brain. Pregnant women, teens, adults, and seniors are all advised to avoid stress. Regardless of the developmental stage, stress can stunt and/or damage existing brain structures. Chronic stress negatively affects memory, attention span, coping resources, problem situation appraisal, academic achievement, and IQ (Orem, Petrac, & Bedwell, 2008; Giancola, Grawitch, & Borchert, 2009; Hopko, Crittendon, Grant, & Wilson, 2005; Robotham & Julian, 2006).
Included in areas affected negatively by stress is a person’s social well-being. Someone who is under severe or chronic stress is less likely to create and/or maintain supportive relationships. In situations of chronic stress a person is more likely to have lower social interaction, lower self esteem, and higher instances of drug and alcohol abuse (Pierceall & Keim, 2007; O’Hare, 2001). At the extreme end of the stress spectrum can contribute to the likelihood that a person will attempt suicide (Wilburn & Smith, 2005).

*Oppression Anxiety*

With the copious amount of information regarding the negative effects of stress it is important to be aware of those particularly vulnerable to stress. Though everyone in life will experience stress, some populations are more vulnerable to persistent and chronic stress. People who have been traumatized or are a member of an oppressed group are particularly vulnerable. These vulnerable groups are at risk of experiencing stress levels above and beyond what is considered normal for those who are not a member of an oppressed or traumatized group. Terms used to describe the experiences of oppressed or traumatized populations are; stereotype threat, acculturative stress, token status, and psychological vulnerability. Each of these terms is related but describes distinct experiences in the lives of oppressed and traumatized people.
“Stereotype threat is being at risk of confirming, as self-characteristic, a negative stereotype about one’s group” (Steele & Aronson, 1995 p797). A study by Steele and Aronson (1995) confirmed that recording race before administering a test made a stereotype salient enough that Black participants underperformed (Steele & Aronson, 1995).

This is significant because a stereotype imposed by society irrespective of a person or their intellectual ability can, will, and has been proven to affect one’s academic performance.

Acculturative stress is the stress associated with learning to adapt to a new culture (Thomas & Choi, 2006). Joiner and Walker (2002) clarify that acculturative stress is above and beyond general life stress. Acculturative stress is mostly discussed when speaking of an immigrant population; however this term may also apply to those born in a dominant culture but have membership in a marginalized culture that has different cultural rules and norms. This dynamic can be seen with some African American communities in the United States. Acculturative stress has all the potential other stress has for negative effects, described above. Thomas and Choi (2006) documented some negative consequences of acculturative stress.
It was documented that acculturative stress may result in increased marginalization, mental health issues, and decreased social support, and academic performance. These consequences are a reiteration of the consequences of other stress; however, it is important to note that acculturative stress is, many times, chronic and is in addition to the stress of everyday life.

Token status is a kind of stressor related to those who have been traumatized or have membership in an oppressed group. Token status is the stress caused by being the only minority in an otherwise homogeneous group. This stressor has been proven to cause deficits in cognitive functioning and memory (Lord & Katz, 1985 as cited in Steele Aronson 1995).

The term psychological vulnerability or reactivity refers to the fact that disadvantaged socioeconomic groups are more reactive to major life events or chronic life strains when compared to more advantaged counterparts (Thoits, 2001). Thoits (2001) tried to explain this increased vulnerability by this populations high stress exposure and low psychosocial resources. The study explained much of the increased vulnerability but not all of it. An alternate explanation was found in Lowenthal (1999).
Lownethal sites Neuberger (1997) which says that people exposed to continuous stress from abuse, maltreatment, or other traumatic event, especially during childhood, are at risk of shrinkage of those regions of the brain responsible for memory, learning, and regulation of affect, and emotional expression. This means that those who are psychologically vulnerable may have a neurological disposition to overreact to stress.

Traumatized and oppressed persons encounter adversity, injustice, discrimination, and hardship on a daily basis. These circumstances are stressors that are likely to cause stress. Because the aforementioned situations are common in the lives of oppressed and traumatized people the stress experienced can be labeled as chronic. In addition to stress caused by unrelated daily obstacles, oppressed persons stress is compounded by a possible neurological disposition to stress, psychological vulnerability, and by consequences of the original stressor. For example, a poor woman of minority heritage may already be predisposed to be more reactive to stress. In her life she encounters discrimination in employment and childcare settings. Consequently these meso level obstacles will cause stress. If this stress becomes chronic the woman may also suffer stress related illness. This illness in turn causes more stress and eventually the stress can perpetuate itself.

Stereotype threat, acculturative stress, token status, and psychological vulnerability are several terms used to describe different obstacles frequently encountered in the lives of oppressed and traumatized people. A term to encompass each of these obstacles and the cyclical nature of the stress encountered is oppression
anxiety. Oppression anxiety highlights the cyclical nature of stress in oppressed populations. Oppressed and traumatized people live in a society that advances stereotypes about their inability. Much like oppression anxiety discussed above, the salience of this stereotype for oppressed and traumatized persons, irrespective of their actual abilities or coping resources, impairs the effectiveness of their actual stress management.

**Effective Stress Management**

As stated previously stress is inescapable, however it is imperative to understand the resources that alleviate stress to a level that is manageable and ideally productive. There is much research on the effectiveness of several resources in alleviating stress. Stress alleviating resources that found much support in the literature were social networks, social problem solving, coping strategies, and integrative intelligence.

**Social support.**

The effectiveness of social support to increase well being and aid in stress management is well documented. Social support has been reported to prevent illness and decrease recovery time, as well as to reduce one’s risk of death from serious injury (House, Landis, & Umberson, 1988 as cited in Kim, Sherman, & Taylor, 2008). Social support has been defined as information from other people that one is loved and cared for, esteemed and valued, and a part of a network of communication and mutual obligation” (Taylor, 1999 p.222 as cited in Weckwerth & Flynn, 2006). Researchers
have further defined social support into categories, these categories are defined by the type of support a person or persons provides. The categories of social support include; esteem support, informational support, social companionship, instrumental support, and financial aid.

Social networks are assumed to have either a buffering or main effect on stress. A model called the buffering effect asserts that social networks play a key role in managing stress by causing those under stress to assess an event as less stressful, by providing resources needed to deal with the stressful situation, or by reducing the perceived importance of the problem (House, 1981). Panzarella, Alloy, and Whitehouse (2006) lend support to the buffering hypothesis with their research on depression. The researchers found that social support helped those vulnerable to depression have a better outlook on their abilities and resources therefore discouraging negative assumptions about life.

Another model that touts the benefits of a social network is the main effect model. As cited in Cohen (1985), this model states that a social network does not buffer stress when it arises rather the inclusion in a social network helps prevent stress from arising and has a generalized beneficial effect. Cohen (1985) finds evidence to support both the main and buffering effect of a social network. It was found that depending on the stressful situation and the resources needed a social network can have either a main or a buffering effect.
Cohen’s findings reiterate the assertions of the matching hypothesis. The matching hypothesis states that the amount of social support is less important than the quality of fit between the person and their need (Weckwerth & Flynn, 2006). This is demonstrated in several places in the literature. Strong examples of the importance of matching are found within diversity and those suffering from post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

The importance of matching when dealing with diversity is evident with gender and cultural diversity. It is documented throughout the literature that men and women experience different levels of stress, women being consistently reported as experiencing a higher level (Hudd et al., 2000; Misra et al., 2000; Frazier & Schauben, 1994; Wohlgemuth & Betz, 1991). Both men and women benefit from different types of social support. In Weckwerth and Flynn (2006), it was shown that much of the stress experienced by women was due to lack of problem based support and much of the stress experienced by men was due to lack of emotionally based support. In this study much of the stress experienced by both men and women was due to a poor match in support.

Similarly, matching is an important concept when dealing with cultural diversity. In a 2008 study by Kim, Sherman, and Taylor, it was found that Asian American students did not seek social support at the same rate or in the same way as their European American peers. In the study, Asian American and European American students were instructed to explicitly seek social support. The stress levels of Asian
American participants increased while that of the European American students decreased. When the directions were changed and the participants were instructed to seek social support implicitly the resulted also changed. European American’s stress levels increased and Asian Americans stress levels decreased during while seeking social support implicitly. Neither approach was innately correct, but depending on culture a particular approach was more useful.

Declercq, Vanheule, Markey, and Willemsen (2007) conducted a study concerning participants with PTSD and social support. As with much of the research, it was shown that social support can help alleviate symptoms of PTSD, however, it was also found that the relationship between emotional support in problem situations and PTSD was positive. This particular kind of social support proved to aggravate symptoms of PTSD. Again, this highlights the necessity of matching.

In many situations, such as the ones previously described, matching is essential. Nevertheless, in most cases any kind of social support is better than none at all. Social support not only has a buffering and/or main effect on stress, there are consequences in the reverse as well. The lack or non existence of social support is linked with adjustment problems, school problems, aggressive behavior (Anan & Barnett, 1999 as cited in Hagan, Myers, & Mackintosh, 2005), depression (Kliewer, Lepore, Oskin, & Johnson, 1998; Lepore et al., 1996 as cited in Hagan, Myers, & Mackintosh, 2005), burnout (Weckwerth & Flynn, 2006), illness and drug and alcohol abuse (Miczo, N., Miczo, A., Johnson, 2006), and higher levels of psychopathology
Research demonstrates that one’s social network is important, it is a vital component for effective stress management, yet it only accounts for part of stress variance. One’s interpersonal resources also account for some of this variance. Research has shown that several interpersonal components are necessary for effective stress management. In the literature, social problem solving, coping strategies, and emotional intelligence (EI) emerge as themes.

**Social problem solving.**

D’Zurilla and Goldfried (1971) developed a concept of social problem solving that was later redefined in various ways. This concept is defined by several researchers. Some of the definitions are as follows; Social problem solving is problem solving as it occurs in the natural environment (D’Zurilla & Nezu, 1982 as cited in Belzer, D’Zurilla, & Maydeu-Olivares, 2002), social problem solving as “the way individuals perceive and cope with problems encountered in daily life” (Baker, 2003 p570), social problem solving as a general coping strategy that can mediate and/or moderate psychological stress by enabling a person to better manage stress and his/her emotional response to stress (D’ Zurilla & Sheedy, 1991), and social problem solving as “the ability to generate alternative solutions to social interaction problems, evaluate the possible consequences, and choose the most effective solution to the problem” (Spivack, Platt, & Shure, 1976 as cited in Dubow et al, 1991 p.585). The consistent
strain in each of these definitions is that social problem solving deals with an individual’s ability to appraise, approach, and resolve a problem. This process involves two sub components; problem orientation and problem solving ability.

Both processes are important for effective applied problem solving. According to D’Zurilla (1986), “Problem orientation is the motivational part of the problem solving process” (D’Zurilla, Chang, Nottingham, & Faccini, 1998 p 1092). Problem orientation deals with a person’s schemas regarding life’s problems, beliefs about internal or external locus of control, and whether (s)he is an effective problem solver or agent of change. A person’s belief about his/her ability to control and effect problem situations motivate or discourage problem solving behavior. Problem solving ability is “the search for a solution through the application of problem solving skills” or coping strategies (Belzer, D’Zurilla, & Maydeu-Olivares, 2002), this is the applied component of social problem solving.

The importance of social problem solving to effective stress management has been greatly documented and the research proves the benefits are modest but numerous. Adequate problem solving skills are linked to behavioral improvement and academic adjustment (Dubow, Tisak, Causey, Hryshko, & Reid, 1991; Dubow & Tisak, 1989), positive problem orientation (Hagan, Myers, & Mackintosh, 2005), adaptive study habits and attitudes (Elliot, Godshall, Shrout, & Witty, 1990 as cited in Baker, 2003), lower stress levels (Chang & D’Zurilla, 1996; D’Zurilla & Sheedy, 1991 as cited in Baker, 2003), partial mediation of the link between stress and
personal well-being (Chang, D’Zurilla, & Sanna, 2007), mediation of the link between stress and negative psychological functioning (Kant et al. 1997; Wei et al. 2003 as cited in D’Zurilla & Sheedy, 1991), and mediation of depression and anxiety (Kant & D’Zurilla, 1997).

Much like social support, adequate social problem solving has great benefits and its absence has great consequences. The absence of appropriate social problem solving skills is linked to future depression (Dubow et al., 1991), excessive worry (Belzer, D’Zurilla, & Maydeu-Olivares, 2002), and suicidal risk (D’Zurilla, Chang, Nottingham, & Faccini, 1998).

Coping strategies. As a rule, it will be found that all of the components needed for effective stress management work together. Indeed, this is the case for social problem solving and coping strategies. Earlier in the text it was stated that the process of social problem solving is to appraise, approach, and resolve a problem. Coping strategies are concerned with the resolution stage of social problem solving. Coping strategies primary functions are to manage the problem causing stress and manage one’s emotions concerning the stress (Kariv et al., 2005). Coping strategies are grouped into three main classes: task oriented, emotion oriented, and avoidance oriented (Higgins & Edler, 1995 as cited in Kariv et al., 2005).
Task oriented coping strategies are those strategies used to solve the problem causing the stress. A task oriented way of coping with a cancer diagnosis is to seek medical treatment. Task oriented coping is used when a person feels that s/he is capable of alleviating or lessening the problem (Berges & Augusto, 2007).

Emotion oriented coping is changing one’s emotional response to a stressor. Using the same example as above, an emotion oriented way of coping with a cancer diagnosis is to join a cancer walk to raise money for research, thereby altering your emotions from hopeless to empowered. Emotion oriented coping is used when a person feels as though they must tolerate a stressful situation (Berges & Augusto, 2007).

Avoidance oriented coping is avoiding the problem situation and situations that remind one of the stressor. Avoidance oriented coping is marked by a person’s “absence of attempts to alter the situation” (Kariv et al., 2005 p 2). If the person diagnosed with cancer refused to talk about his/her condition, and avoided contact with the medical community, this would be an example of an avoidant coping response. Avoidant coping responses are used when a person is unclear of his/her emotions and feels as though the problem situation cannot be effected (Chan, 2005). Each coping strategy is very different; however the same person can employ all three coping responses at different stages of the same problem. Clearly, these strategies very seldom work in isolation.
Coping strategies are developed throughout life. Because coping strategies are learned, the manner in which one’s nuclear family copes contributes to the manner in which an individual copes (Berges & Augusto, 2007). Furthermore, the utilization of coping strategies is effected by the details of the problem situation as well as personal demographic information. A study by Kariv et al (2005) concluded that age and gender were predictors of utilization of avoidance strategies.

The active strategies, task oriented and emotions oriented, are generally associated with better adjustment, less stress, and mediated symptoms of depression (Causy & Dubow, 1993 as cited in Kariv et al., 2005 p 2). Though usually not ideal, avoidance may, at times, be an effective strategy. Each of the strategies are useful, however, in specific situations a particular strategy may be more appropriate.

*Integrative intelligence.*

One’s selection of coping strategies brings emotional intelligence to the forefront. According to Salovey and Mayer (1990) emotional intelligence is the ability to identify, regulate, and improve emotion. Goleman's (1995) definition of emotion includes the abilities mentioned by Salovey and Mayer and adds the ability to motivate oneself and handle relationships (as cited in Hunt & Evans, 2004). It has been document that the selection of coping strategy is influenced by emotional intelligence. In a study by Pau et al (2004) it was found that dental undergraduates with higher emotional intelligence more often adopted reflection and appraisal, social and interpersonal, and organizational and time management skills to deal with stress. In
the same study students with low emotional intelligence more often engaged in health-
damaging behaviors to cope with stress. Emotional intelligence has influence over the 
utilization of coping strategies because those who are more emotionally intelligent will 
tend to select more appropriate coping strategies (Chan, 2005). This relationship 
between emotional intelligence and coping strategies is once more demonstrated in the 
research by Montes-Berges and Augusto (2007). This study was conducted to explore 
the relationship between perceived emotional intelligence, coping, social support and 
mental health in nursing students. It was found that nursing professionals with clarity 
about the emotion they were experiencing were better able to regulate these emotions, 
presumably through the use of appropriate coping strategies.

These same nursing professionals with high emotional intelligence reported 
lower stress levels in their jobs. This is not a surprising finding since many researchers 
have observed and documented the stress diminishing qualities of emotional 
intelligence. Chan (2005) found a mediation effect of emotional intelligence on 
psychological distress. Taking the beneficial effects of emotional intelligence a step 
further, there is research to show that persons with higher emotional intelligence report 
fewer psychological symptoms related to traumatic experiences (Hunt & Evans, 
2003).

Though described in isolation it is apparent that social problem solving, coping 
strategies and emotional intelligence are inseparable phenomena. They influence each
other and work concurrently. For this reason it is important that individuals have the ability to integrate these competencies. The harmonious functioning of these competencies is called integrative intelligence. In addition to having social problem solving, coping strategies, and emotional intelligence one must be able to identify and assess a situation and decide which tool, competency, or mixture thereof is necessary to alleviate stress. A person who has several competencies and can appropriately use one or many of them to improve a situation has integrative intelligence. It is important that a person be able to regulate and integrate these functions because imposing a false isolation of these abilities will render one less effective.

The information above integrates numerous studies to come to the conclusion that social support, social problem solving, coping strategies, and emotional intelligence are all necessary components to effective stress management. It has been touched on that each of these resources has stress alleviating benefits on their own but they necessarily work in accord. However, what happens if one of the components of stress management is lacking or absent?

When an event or ongoing situation disrupts the interplay of the stress management resources, the cyclical nature of stress becomes blatantly apparent. An article by Lowenthal (1999) described the consequences of chronic stress, such as abuse, in childhood. Children who are under chronic stress brains are physically altered. The regions of the brain responsible for regulation of affect, empathy, and emotion are likely to malfunction. The process of attachment is likely to be disrupted
and children often begin to mistrust their environment (Nash, 1997 as cited in Lowenthal, 1999). Even in adulthood negative consequences persist. Studies of adults who experienced continuous abuse in childhood indicated that prolonged stress results in shrinkage the part of the brain responsible for memory, learning, and regulation of affect and emotional expression (Nueberger, 1997, as cited in Lowenthal, 1999).

The physical consequences of prolonged stress cause an individual to be at a disadvantage for acquiring the appropriate stress management tools. A person who is mistrusting and cannot regulate emotion, affect, or empathy is not likely to build many social networks. Moreover, if a person is under chronic stress in adulthood this stressor is likely to erode any social support networks that are formed (Lepore, Evans, & Schneider, 1991). This means that chronic stress both prevents and undermines social support.

It is not only social support that is compromised by chronic stress. Because chronic stress disrupts a person’s emotion, affect, and empathy it can hinder the development of adequate emotional intelligence. Keeping in mind that all of these components are connected, when emotional intelligence is compromised then the ability to select appropriate coping strategies is also compromised. This is the case because a person with higher emotional intelligence is more likely to utilize appropriate and proactive coping strategies. Taking the chain of effects one step further the connection between social problem solving and coping strategies must be mentioned. Part of having successful problem solving has to do with the utilization of
appropriate coping strategies.

The connection between these components of successful stress management may then become confusing. It seems in order to be in the optimal position to manage stress one must have low stress. This conundrum is precisely the reason for the application of a stress management training.

*Role of Stress Management Workshops in Improving Functioning*

Students have been widely used in stress related studies. Not only is the student population an obviously convenient population for research on college campuses but it is well documented that students, in general, have high stress levels. Canales-Gonzales, Kranz, Granberry, and Tanguma make the reasoning for targeting this population clear in a 2008 study. This study found that most students self rated their stress levels as average or above average yet just a little over half of the students used an active approach to reduce stress. In addition to the student’s lack of effort to alleviate stress, fifty percent of the students did not know the resources available to students on their campus. Several studies have been done to research the effectiveness of short term interventions stress management groups.

Hawkins, Reddy, and Bunker evaluated a stress management course for a small group of adults in Australia. The course that was evaluated consisted of six weekly two hour sessions. During the sessions cognitive behavior strategies were taught to participants. The researchers stated that the aim of this course was “to improve participants’ understanding of stress, increase in coping skills and assist in establishing
a greater degree of self management and control over the physiological, cognitive and behavioral components of anxiety” (Hawkins, Reddy, & Bunker, 2007 p108). The results of this study found a significant reduction in stress symptoms, anxiety, depression, hostility, and increased self-esteem. These improvements remained six months after course completion for stress, anxiety, and depression.

In 2007, the same year as the Hawkins, Reddy, and Bunker study, there was another evaluation of a stress management program. Redwood and Pollak reported on an evaluation of a student-led stress management program for first-year medical students. First year medical students participating in the stress management program would begin in the fall semester and meet with a group for one hour per week for seven consecutive weeks. The objective of the stress management program was to help students develop stress management skill and build peer support systems. Meetings were used to teach students how to practice relaxation, reframe thoughts, and better understand stress and how to deal with and prevent it. Meetings also discussed how to develop and maintain social networks. The Redwood Pollak article was written to summarize data collected from students who participated during the initial sixteen years of the program. It was found that the program was beneficial to both student participants and student leaders. Seventy two percent of student participants who completed the program evaluation found the experience valuable. Sixty eight percent agreed that the program helped them manage stress. An even higher percent, ninety one percent of student leaders found that the program was a valuable learning
A similar study concerning a stress management seminar is relevant to this discussion. This was a pretest post test evaluation of a forty five minute seminar given to students. The seminar gave students cognitive behavioral techniques and relaxation exercises to better handle stressful situations. Students self reported their stress levels both before and after the seminar. According the students pre and post tests, it was found that the seminar was effective in significantly lowering stress levels. The researchers noted that this was in line with the findings of Godbey and Courage (1994), Heaman (1995), and Roembke (1995) that seminars about stress could be effective in aiding in better coping of stressful situations.

Three stress interventions were discussed. The time allotted for training was very different ranging from twelve hours to forty five minutes. Two of the trainings explicitly used cognitive behavioral and relaxation techniques and the other used parts of each of these techniques. Regardless of the length of the interventions they were found effective in reducing stress. This is significant support for the use of short term stress interventions.

The stress management workshops discussed focused mainly on enhancing cognitive behavioral ability and understanding stress. Each of these workshops was found to effective in some way. Still with the information we have about stress and effective stress management it is apparent that many stress management interventions lack the integration of all the skills necessary to deal with stress optimally. From the
information available on stress and stress management we can surmise that a more integrative approach in stress management that encompasses the enhancement of social network building, coping strategies, social problem solving and integrative intelligence will yield a more substantial result.
Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

Conceptual Framework

The purpose of the study is to measure the effectiveness of a stress management workshop in reducing stress and increasing the aptitude for social capital building. This researcher has analyzed secondary data obtained from a quasi experimental intervention. The variables in this study that examined the effectiveness of a short term stress management workshop in reducing stress and increasing the aptitude for social capital were stress, level and aptitude for establishing social networks. The independent variable is the above titled intervention. The dependent variables are aptitude for establishing social networks and stress level. For the purpose of this study social networks/capital will be defined as person or persons that the participant identifies as someone who s/he may depend on in time of stress or need. Stress will be defined as mental anxiety or distress concerning an event or obligation. These variables will be measured using a stress checklist and a scale on social capital and networks.

Prior to the intervention a non probability convenience sample of students was organized. Each participant took a pretest to measure aptitude for building social capital and filled out a stress check list. The intervention used relaxation techniques, distressing to prepare oneself to understand the context of situational stress, importance of awareness, explicit building of social networks within groups, and
applied stress management techniques to decrease participant stress and increase aptitude for establishing social networks in a onetime two hour session.

A post test was taken by each participant after the intervention to determine the efficacy of the intervention in increasing aptitude for building social capital.

The relationship between the dependent and independent variables have been documented vigorously. According to D’Zurilla and Sheedy (1991) and Baker (2003) problem solving ability and proper stress coping is an important predictor of perceived and future psychological stress. The other independent variable, social networks is seen as having two beneficial relationships to stress management. The buffering effect of social networks, as discussed in House (1981), is seen as a resource to deal with stress once it arises, main effects of social networks are thought to prevent some stress all together (Cohen,1985).

**Study Design**

This research is a quantitative pre experimental exploratory design. This design has both advantages and disadvantages. An advantage of this approach is the nature of quantitative research. The research will be succinct and accessible for the use of future researcher. Also with quantitative research little can be misinterpreted or misunderstood. Additionally, since this research is exploratory is can lead to better understanding, better research questions, and overall more research. Finally, the quasi experimental aspect of the research allows an intervention to be introduced to further understand is applicability.
The disadvantages of this study design also need to be taken into consideration. Though quantitative data is succinct, accessible, and to the point it may leave out important non quantifiable factors such as feelings about the intervention, interaction between trainer and participant, major occurrences in participant’s life, etc. The exploratory design gives much freedom to the facilitator but only cursory knowledge and more questions come of the research. Similarly, a quasi experiment gives more freedom and is more accessible to researchers but because there is no control or random sampling both internal and external validity are threatened with this design.

The advantages and disadvantages of the study design were taken into account when considering the type of knowledge sought by this research. This research is expected to provide introductory knowledge that may be used in forming other hypotheses in order to conduct more extensive and rigorous research in the future. The anticipated benefits of this knowledge are many. As stated above, this knowledge is expected to lead to well formed hypotheses and further research. This knowledge may also lead to information about the possibility and effectiveness of more complete interventions. Taking these benefits into consideration as a whole, this research may contribute to the knowledge needed to eventually provide a human service that enhances the quality of life.

The design of this study is one group pre test post test design. This design is appropriate when taking into consideration the type of knowledge sought and the
resources and timeframe in which the study will be conducted. A one group pretest post test design makes obtaining exploratory knowledge accessible.

Though the design of this research was chosen for its goodness of fit with the type of knowledge sought, threats to validity are of concern. This research will be conducted in a short moment of time. Because of the lack of extended time spent intervening and measuring this population, it will be impossible to determine if the effects measured are short term. In addition, this study design does not have the capacity to measure latent effects of the intervention. Also contributing a threat to validity is the quasi experimental design used. As a practice, quasi experimental designs do not have a control group nor are participants selected randomly. Considering the absence of these two safeguards, it is determined that this research has low internal validity and cannot be generalized.

The threats to validity are addressed by the scientific community. It is understood among professionals that a design such as this, exploratory quasi experimental, cannot be generalized or used on its own to create new knowledge. The community of researchers understands that because of the low internal and external validity results may only be used to form more study questions or used along with corroborating research.
Study Population and Sample

The population of study participants will be drawn from students in the College of Health and Human Services at Sacramento State University. Potential participants will be reached through flyers distributed throughout the college campus in the Fall of 2009. All participants interested will be voluntary participants and will agree to attending one group session on stress management and social capital building. All volunteers were accepted as far as capacity regulations allowed. This study had several units of analysis, these analyses include a mean stress level and workshop satisfaction level, a t test for paired samples to analyze change in aptitude to build social capital, and a pearson’s correlation to determine the correlation between stress level and workshop satisfaction.

The weakness in the selection procedure is the method of information distribution. Students will have to be attentive and interested to notice posted flyers. Additional weaknesses of the selection process is that only those students who are organized and diligent will likely follow up with the opportunity to participate and make time in his/her schedule to attend a group session. Because of the design of the selection process the sample group may be composed of highly organized students with some access to spare time.

It is anticipated that the participants of this study will be predominantly female because according to CSU Enrollment for Fall 2006 over half of the population of the campus is female. This researcher also assumes that most participants will work part
time or not at all because these students may have more available time to attend enhancement workshops. In addition, it is assumed that many of the participants will be graduate students because of their high stress level and understanding of the necessity of the research. Additional assumptions about population cannot be made.

Data Collection Techniques

The data used for this study will be secondary data. Permission was given to this researcher by Dr. Jude Antonyappan and Dr. Susan Egg man to use data obtained in a stress reduction workshop held at CSU Sacramento campus in the year 2010. The primary researchers Dr. Antonyappan and Dr. Egg man obtained permission to conduct this research through the human subjects committee on CSU Sacramento campus. This researcher’s use of the secondary data was approved by the committee for protection of human subjects.

This researcher will not scout for volunteer participant or obtain informed consent because of the sole use of secondary data. This data is pretest post test data and a stress check list obtained during a short term intervention designed to reduce stress and increase aptitude for establishing social networks. Participants pretest post test scores was analyzed using a paired sample t test, a pearson’s correlation will also be used to determine correlations between stress level and workshop satisfaction.
Though internal and external validity are threatened with simple pretest post test designs, this data is appropriate for this exploratory study. This data is appropriate because the design makes exploring this topic accessible. The knowledge gained from this data may provide the information necessary to perform more rigorous research designs in the future.
Chapter 4

DATA ANALYSIS

This chapter presents the findings from the study on the effectiveness of the stress management workshop. The findings are organized into the following sections: the first set of analysis calculated the average pre and post test social capital scores to ascertain whether the workshop had an impact in increasing the aptitude for building social capital as a result of the reduction in the stress, the second set of analysis calculated the mean perceived workshop effectiveness and the mean stress level among participants, the third set of analysis utilized a Pearson’s statistic to calculate the correlation between stress score, as measured by the stress checklist, and perceived workshop effectiveness score. These findings are discussed by linking them with the themes identified in the literature review.

Upon entering the workshop participants were asked to fill out a measurement tool to determine their initial aptitude for building social capital. Once the workshop was over, participants were asked to fill out another measurement tool to determine their post test aptitude for building social capital. Both the initial and post test tool for measuring social capital are found in the appendix. The table below lists results of this analysis of this data.
The chart above shows that there was an increase in the average post test scores. This indicates that on average participants ability to build social capital increased as a result of the workshop. Despite the small sample size, this increase is deemed significant.

In chapter 2 social capital capacity was discussed in terms of the actual social network and access to a supportive social networks that can be used as a resource during a time of stress or need. The literature review found many researchers outlining the appropriate use of social network as essential to alleviating stress. Social networks are said to have a buffer and/or main effect on stress (House, 1981; Panzarella, Alloy, and Whitehouse, 2006; Cohen, 1985) that is social networks may prevent and/or reduce stress in a person’s life.

Table 4.1

*Mean Aptitude for Social Network Ability Pre & Post*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pair 1</td>
<td>pretest</td>
<td>52.9091</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>posttest</td>
<td>56.9545</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>25.88708</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Stress and social networks affect each other reciprocally because a certain level of stress also impairs one’s capacity for building positive social networks. It is documented that those under severe and/or chronic stress decrease all social interactions and are less likely to seek out meaningful social connections. One the other side of this spectrum, the reduction in stress can increase one’s confidence in one’s ability to build social networks/capital.

Identifying social capital capacity and social networks as an essential part of stress reduction, the workshop from which the analyzed data was obtained sought to use education, explicit building of social networks, and applied stress management techniques to increase participant aptitude for establishing social networks. The chart on the previous page shows the workshop increased social capital capacity by four points on average according to the t-test for paired samples. This small but detectable increase was practically but not statistically significant. The increase was not statistically significant as the p value was more than .05. Taking into consideration there was an increase in the post mean aptitude score for social capital building and that the workshop was brief, lasting only for two hours, this increase was of practical significance.

A study done by Patron (2010) showed that stress levels are steadily increasing due partly to the recession. Employers and staff agree that the difficult economic times have increased stress levels in workers. This problem is exasperated by the fact that very few places of work or educational programs have established programs for stress
reduction. In addition, Patron reported that there is currently no recognized standard or official benchmark for good practice for psychosocial risk assessment and management. In the same Patron study only six percent of employees polled felt their company worked hard to help staff alleviate stress. Considering the increasing level of stress, a stress checklist was given to assess each participants’ baseline stress level upon entering the workshop. This checklist can be found in appendix a.

Table 4.2

*Mean Stress Score of Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stress score</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>11.00</td>
<td>24.00</td>
<td>18.0455</td>
<td>3.92158</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data was also analyzed to determine the mean stress level of the participants. Similar to the findings of Canales-Gonzalez, Kranz, and Tanguma (2008), on average students had an average to above average stress level. A stress checklist was filled out by each student upon entering the workshop. The stress scores ranged from a score of 0 to a score of 30. In the stress checklist utilized a higher score indicated less stress. The mean stress score of participants was 18.0455 with a minimum score of 11.0 and a maximum score of 24.0. It can be determined by the scores that every participant reported experiencing some level of stress. This data makes it apparent that an
effective and practical stress management workshop would be appropriate for this population.

According to the results of the data on average participants perceived the workshop as effective. At the end of the workshop participants were asked to rate the effectiveness of the workshop. Participants were asked to circle one of the following choices; not at all helpful, not helpful, neutral, moderately helpful, or very helpful. Each choice was assigned a number value from 1-5, 5 indicating very helpful and 1 indicating not very helpful. Participants mean effectiveness score was determined to be 4.1818, above moderately helpful.

Table 4.3

Pearson’s Correlations Between Stress Score & Workshop Satisfaction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>stressscore</th>
<th>Pearson Correlation</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>stressscore</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-.472*</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>.026</td>
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workshopperception | Pearson Correlation | Sig. (2-tailed) | N |
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<td>22</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
As indicated by Table 4.3 there was a medium to negative correlation between stress level and workshop satisfaction (.472). This means that participants who reported more stress in the stress checklist found the workshop more satisfying. In accordance with the findings in the literature review of other short term stress management interventions students derive benefit and find such short term practical interventions helpful.
Chapter 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

This study sought to analyze the effectiveness of a short term stress intervention in reducing stress and increasing aptitude for building social networks. Secondary data was analyzed to determine the effectiveness of the stress management workshop in reducing stress level and increasing social capital building capacity. Two measures of social capital capacity were taken using a stress checklist and a social capital capacity questionnaire. The data was analyzed using a paired sample t-test as well as a Pearson’s correlation. This study revealed two significant findings, concerning the aptitude of participants to build social networks before and after the workshop as well as the correlation between participant stress level and participant satisfaction with the workshop.

Participant aptitude to build social networks was measured using a pre test. Upon entering the workshop participants were instructed to fill out and turn in the pre test. Each participant went through the workshop and at the end the participants were given a post test to measure the same variable, aptitude to build social networks. A t-test for paired samples was used to run the data.
The data showed on average that persons who participated in the two hour stress intervention workshop aptitude increased by 4.04545, from 52.9091 to 56.9545. According to the t-test this was not statistically significant but it was practically significant increase.

Implications for Social Work Practice

Practice.

Taking into consideration the implications of the literature review as well as the findings of the study there are numerous implications for social work practice. Several themes emerged in the literature review, these themes included the increase of stress and the maladies caused by excessive and/or chronic stress and the research supported components of effective stress management. The components of effective stress management include; adequate social support, social problem solving skills, coping strategies, and integrative intelligence. Interventions discussed in the literature review sought to build one or more of these components in participants.

Applying this knowledge the intervention discussed in this study sought to build coping strategies and increase aptitude to build adequate social support/networks. The result of this study showed that even an intervention as short as two hours in duration can increase participants ability to deal with stress. This impacts social work practice in a practical way. Social workers should be made aware of the increasing hindrance of stress on client’s potential to actualize and succeed. In addition, social workers should also be made aware of the realistic use of short term...
interventions to assist their clients in reducing stress and achieving goals. Short term stress intervention is a resource seldom used by professionals in the field because professionals have scant knowledge of either the problem or the intervention. Another implication for social work practice brought to light by this and other studies is the social worker’s role in connecting clients with useful social connections as well as encouraging and assisting clients in maintaining such healthful relationships.

Research.

There is much research about the detrimental effects of stress especially as it concerns medical conditions and mental illness. Additionally, there is much known about particular resources that prevent and alleviate stress. Several have been highlighted throughout chapter two. One of the most numerous researched tools for stress alleviation is the access to adequate social networks. Still, with numerous research concerning tools for stress alleviation two components are missing, research on the effectiveness of attempts to enhance stress alleviating tools and the proper distribution of knowledge gained through research.

More research is needed on the effectiveness of enhancing persons’ tools to alleviate stress by way of short term intervention. In a cursory search for research concerning short term stress interventions, few results were found. Having the knowledge that all suffer from some level of stress and that stress is debilitating, it would stand to reason that measures to alleviate this human need should be taken and
documented. These measures need to be informed by rigorous academic research. At this point, not enough research is available to construct a well informed intervention. The second missing aspect of research is the satisfactory dissemination of research information past research professionals and to practitioners working directly with clients. Though much is known about stress and resources to alleviate it, this knowledge is largely kept in the academic research world. In order for clients to gain the benefits of this knowledge, practitioners will have to be trained to understand, recognize, and properly intervene when stress is a substantial road block in client’s progress. This dissemination and application of information is yet to be seen.

**Policy.**

Knowing the prevalence of stress and the detriments caused by it policy should be used to lessen its effects on citizens. Social workers have an obligation to engage in policy advocacy on behalf of their clients. For this reason social workers should advocate that stress alleviation be a concern when talking about citizen’s access to health care and social services. Politicians should be encouraged to consider policy and funding concerning stress prevention and alleviation as a built in component of public health and social service. The research can inform the public and those in office that investment of policy and funding in stress prevention and alleviation is an investment in the prevention of escalating physical and mental illness.
Behavior.

Social workers access clients on a daily basis. Social workers assess for mental illness, abuse, and mental capacity among other things. A social worker doing assessments should have the knowledge of the effects of chronic and/or long term stress. This information may prevent a false or misinformed diagnosis of a client.

Recommendations

The problem researched in this study was the effectiveness of a stress management workshop in reducing stress and increasing the aptitude for establishing social networks. This researcher hypothesized that the short term stress intervention and social capital building workshop would lessen the level of stress and increase capacity for social network building with participants. Secondary data was analyzed from the described intervention. The data concluded that participants had a medium level of stress with a mean stress level of 18.455 on a scale ranging from 0 being extremely high stress and 30 being extremely low stress. Participants perceived the workshop as effective with a mean workshop effectiveness of 4.1818 with a score of 1 meaning not at all helpful and a score of 5 meaning very helpful. Though the data showed that the social network building capacity increased on average by four points as a result of the workshop this was practically but not statistically significant. The data showed a medium to strong negative correlation of stress level to perceived workshop effectiveness, that is participants with a higher stress level perceived the workshop as more effective than participants with a lower stress levels.
This research followed an exploratory design. It yielded useful data to continue research concerning the implementation of an effective short term stress intervention. The results of the paired sample t test measuring aptitude for social capital capacity were encouraging. Though the results were not statistically significant an average increase in aptitude for social capital capacity was seen. This implies that a larger sample and/or a longer intervention may have resulted in a statistically significant increase. Further research needs to be conducted on the presence or lack of long term effects on one’s ability to navigate stress. With further research interventions can be made increasingly effective and available to the public in order to decrease the detrimental effects of stress.
APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

Stress Checklist Questionnaire

2. Minor problems and disappointments upset me excessively.
   Strongly agree  agree  neutral  disagree  strongly disagree

8. I feel inadequate or suffer from self doubt
   All the time  frequently  sometimes  rarely  never

34. I feel tired.
   All the time  frequently  sometimes  rarely  never

35. I experience flashes of anger over a minor problem.
   All the time  frequently  sometimes  rarely  never

36. I notice a change in my sleeping or eating patterns.
   All the time  frequently  sometimes  rarely  never

37. I suffer from chronic pain, headaches, or back aches.
   Strongly agree  agree  neutral  disagree  strongly disagree
APPENDIX B

Social Capital Measurement Pre- Test

How many resources do you access on campus in an academic year? Please check all that apply

Writing center

Financial Aid

Scholarships

Student Health Center

Physical Exercise Opportunities

Noon Time Health Activities

Student Organized Spiritual Activities

Student Organized Relaxation Activities

Team Building Activities

Transportation-Ride Share

Security Services

Please indicate your degree of participation in the groups that you are a member of by using the following schema

Leader 1

Very active 2

Somewhat active 3

Not active 4
Student Groups

Community Groups

Neighborhood Groups

Parent Groups

Spiritual Network/Church Groups

Political Advocacy Groups

How many of the groups that you are a member of would you consider as assets to you in meeting your challenges in life? Please explain in the space below.

During stressful times in your life how many contacts can you rely on for help?

At times of emergency, do you have social contacts who could help you?

What resources do you currently have for managing stress in your life?

What is the frequency of your visits with friends?
What is the frequency of your visits with family?

How often do you maintain significant telephone contact with friends?
How often do you maintain significant telephone contact with extended family members?

How often do you maintain significant email contact with friends?
How often do you maintain significant email contact with extended family members?

Do you have a mentor?

Do you have someone whom you consult for making important decisions?

Do you have a circle of persons to rely on for meeting those needs that you cannot meet on your own?
APPENDIX C

Social Capital Measurement Post-Test

How many resources do you access on campus in an academic year? Please check all that apply

Writing center
Financial Aid
 Scholarships
Student Health Center
Physical Exercise Opportunities
Noon Time Health Activities
Student Organized Spiritual Activities
Student Organized Relaxation Activities
Team Building Activities
Transportation-Ride Share
Security Services

Please indicate your degree of participation in the groups that you are a member of by using the following schema

Leader 1
Very active 2
Somewhat active 3
Not active 4
Student Groups

Community Groups

Neighborhood Groups

Parent Groups

Spiritual Network/Church Groups

Political Advocacy Groups

How many of the groups that you are a member of do you intend to consider as assets to you in meeting your challenges in life? Please explain in the space below.

How many contacts of yours do you actively plan on developing for access to help you during stressful times in your life?

How hopeful are you that at times of emergency, you will have social contacts who could help you?

Are you hopeful that you will be able to develop and maintain resources to help you manage stress in your life?
Is there a change in the frequency of your visits with friends that you intend to have?

What is the frequency of your visits with family that you intend to have?

How often do you intend to maintain significant telephone contact with friends?

How often do you intend to maintain significant telephone contact with extended family members?

How often do you intend to maintain significant email contact with friends?

How often do you intend to maintain significant email contact with extended family members?

Do you plan on having a mentor?

Do you intend to develop a mentoring relationship with someone whom you consult for making important decisions?
Do you feel confident about developing a circle of persons to rely on for meeting those needs that you cannot meet on your own?

On a scale of 1-5 how helpful was this workshop in helping you increase your readiness for increasing you social capital?

Very Helpful-1
Moderately Helpful-2
Neutral-3
Not Helpful-4
Not helpful at all-5
REFERENCES


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