Whose Emotional Support is Effective for Teachers' Mental Health? : Suggestions Based on an Analysis Using Structural Equation Modeling

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Whose Emotional Support is Effective for Teachers’ Mental Health?: Suggestions Based on an Analysis Using Structural Equation Modeling

Abstract

The present study examined the influence of emotional support on teachers’ efficacy, teachers’ stressors, and teachers’ intention of leave of absence/resignation, and it aimed to an analysis using Structural Equation Modeling to examine whose emotional support was effective for teachers’ mental health. The author carried out an inventory survey with 455 public elementary and junior high school teachers, which contained questions to measure the following four variables: 1) emotional support; 2) teachers’ efficacy; 3) teachers’ stressors; and 4) teachers’ intention of leave of absence/resignation. The author examined the model based on the hypothesis: While teachers’ stressors increase teachers’ intention of leave of absence/resignation, (a) emotional support increases teachers’ efficacy; and (b) emotional support reduce teachers’ stressors and teachers’ intention of leave of absence/resignation. Furthermore, the author examined whose emotional support increased teachers’ efficacy, and reduced teachers’ stressors and their intention of leave of absence/resignation. By a analysis using the Structural Equation Modeling, the results suggested that while teachers’ stressors increased teachers’ intention of leave of absence/resignation, (a) emotional support by superiors reduced teachers’ stressors; (b) emotional support by colleagues increased teachers’ efficacy, and as a result, would reduce teachers’ intention of leave of absence/resignation; and (c) emotional support by colleagues increased teachers’ efficacy, and as a result, would reduce teachers’ stressors. Therefore, the hypothesis was partially supported.

Keywords: school teachers, emotional support, intention of leave of absence, intention of resignation, mental health

Introduction

Currently, the number of school teachers who take a leave of absence due to mental illnesses are increasing. There were 4,891 people on a leave of absence due to mental illness among public school teachers in the fiscal year 2016. This number of leaves is approximately seven times that of the 1979 fiscal year (664 people), when the survey began (The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2017). So far, studies on teachers’ mental health have mainly focused on burnout and stress. For example, “difficulty in guidance and correspondence for students and guardians” has been shown to affect teachers’ burnout (Mori, 2007). Further, there are reports that teachers feel the most stressful with respect to “colleagues” (Nakagawa, Kotani, Nishimura, Inoue, Nishikawa, & Nou, 2000; Akaoka, & Taniguchi, 2009). However, there are few studies on teachers’ leave of absence; moreover, it has been revealed that teachers’ stressors such as “guardian stressors,” “colleague stressors,” and “school affairs stressors” are affecting the increase of teachers’ intention of leave of absence/resignation (Kusagai, 2014). In this way, factors that have a negative influence on the mental health of teachers have been clarified.
The teacher’s burnout model and stress model are recognized as those in which negative chains are constructed. For example, the following models are constructed. “Teachers’ stressors increase burnout tendency. As a result, teachers’ efficacy reduces, and students’ attitudes and qualities are negatively recognized.” (Hiraoka, 2003). “Lack of support by superiors increase teacher’s emotional stress. Emotional stress increases the feeling of exhaustion. As a result, this increases the intention of resignation.” (Skaalvik, E. M., & Skaalvik, S., 2016).

On a daily basis, in order to find ways to reduce teachers’ intention of leave of absence/resignation, for those who are engaged in educational activities while being exposed to various stressors, it is also necessary to consider a model in which positive chains are constructed. In a past study by the author, it was suggested that emotional support is positively related to teachers’ efficacy, and is negatively related to teachers’ stressors and intention of leave of absence/resignation (Kusagai, 2018). Based on this, in the present study, the author examined the model based on the hypothesis: While teachers’ stressors increase teachers’ intention of leave of absence/resignation, (a) emotional support increases teachers’ efficacy; and (b) emotional support reduces teachers’ stressors and teachers’ intention of leave of absence/resignation. Furthermore, the author examined whose emotional support increased teachers’ efficacy, and reduced teachers’ stressors and their intention of leave of absence/resignation.

Methods

Participants

The participants in this study were 455 public elementary and junior high school teachers. Ultimately, the responses of 340 teachers (224 elementary school teachers and 116 junior high school teachers; average age 40.5 years, standard deviation 9.03 years; effective response rate 93.2%) were analyzed.

Material

The questionnaire consisted of the Thinking about Leaves of Absence and Resignation of Teachers Scale by Kusagai (2014), the Teachers’ Stressors Scale by Shimizu (2012), the Teachers’ Efficacy Scale by Matsuo and Shimizu (2007), and the Emotional Support Scale by Komaki (1994). Each question was answered on a five-point scale.

Procedure

The author mailed the questionnaire to a representative of each school, who then distributed copies to the participants. The representative collected the completed questionnaires and sent them back to the author.

Results

In order to clarify the influence of emotional support on teachers’ mental health, the author drew the path from emotional support to teachers’ efficacy, teachers’ stressors, and their intention of leave of absence/resignation. Further, the author drew the path from teachers’ efficacy to teachers’ stressors, and their intention of leave of absence/resignation. Moreover, in order to confirm that the factors regulating teachers’ intention of leave of absence/resignation were stressors, the author drew the path from teachers’ stressors to teachers’ intention of leave of absence/resignation. Thereafter, the author conducted an analysis using Structural Equation Modeling. In results, appropriate goodness of fit of the model was obtained; $\chi^2 (1) = .34, p = .56$ (n.s.), GFI = 1.00, AGFI = 1.00, CFI = 1.00, RMSEA = .00, AIC = 18.34, BIC = 52.80. The following three paths were shown while teachers’ stressors increased their intention of leave of absence/resignation. The first path was that emotional support reduced teachers’ stressors ($\beta = -.24, p < .001$). The second path was that emotional support increased teachers’ efficacy ($\beta = .24, p < .001$) and, as a result, would reduce teachers’ intention of leave of absence/resignation ($\beta = -.25, p < .001$). The third path was that emotional support increased teachers’ efficacy ($\beta = .24, p < .001$) and, as a result, would reduce teachers’ stressors ($\beta = -.12, p < .05$) (Figure 1).
Furthermore, the author specifically examined whose emotional support (superiors, colleagues, friends, and families) was effective for teachers’ mental health. As a result, the following results suggested that while teachers’ stressors increased teachers’ intention of leave of absence/resignation ($\beta = .46$, $p < .001$), (a) emotional support by superiors reduced teachers’ stressors ($\beta = -.30$, $p < .001$); (b) emotional support by colleagues increased teachers’ efficacy ($\beta = .17$, $p < .05$), and as a result, would reduce teachers’ intention of leave of absence/resignation ($\beta = -.25$, $p < .001$); and (c) emotional support by colleagues increased teachers’ efficacy ($\beta = .17$, $p < .05$), and as a result, would reduce teachers’ stressors ($\beta = -.12$, $p < .05$). The goodness of fit of the model was $\chi^2(4) = 1.33$, $p = .86$ (n.s.), GFI = 1.00, AGFI = .99, CFI = 1.00, RMSEA = .00, AIC = 49.33, BIC = 141.23, which confirmed that it was a good fit (Figure 2).
Discussion

The results of the present research partially supported the following hypothesis: While teachers’ stressors increase teachers’ intention of leave of absence/resignation, (a) emotional support increases teachers’ efficacy; and (b) emotional support reduces teachers’ stressors and teachers’ intention of leave of absence/resignation. Furthermore, the author also examined whose emotional support was effective for teachers’ mental health. In results, although teachers’ stressors increase their intention of leave of absence/resignation to some extent, superiors’ emotional support contributed the most to reduce teachers’ stressors. In addition, colleagues’ emotional support contributed the most to increase teachers’ efficacy and would contribute to reduce teachers’ stressors and intention of leave of absence/resignation.

In a previous study by the author, it was suggested that all emotional support by superiors, colleagues, friends, and families were negatively related to teachers’ intention of leave of absence/resignation. However, in this study, emotional support had no direct influence on teachers’ intention of leave of absence/resignation. Also, teachers’ efficacy and teachers’ stressors were affected only by emotional support of their colleagues and superiors. Therefore, this study helped narrow down the source of emotional support that contributed to teachers’ mental health, by examining sources in detail. Moreover, three paths were clarified by an analysis using Structural Equation Modeling, and we were able to confirm the direction toward maintenance and improvement of teachers’ mental health.

Teachers are stressed by people around them, which increases their intention of leave of absence/resignation. On the other hand, an internal feeling like teachers’ efficacy is also supported by people around them. Given these, it can be said that how individuals interact and connect with others on a daily basis is directly connected with teachers’ mental health.

According to Yamamoto (2013), at a lecture on teachers’ mental health, it was found that 80 to 90% of teachers chose the first school, when asked the following question, “Which school would you choose for a new post: (1) A school having many students with problematic behaviors and where you would be exhausted from guiding students, but where the atmosphere of the teachers’ room is very good, and colleagues are helpful; (2) A school where you would not be troubled with student instruction at all, which has only reasonable students, but the atmosphere of the teachers’ room is poor, and colleagues get in each other’s way.” This also suggests that primary factors that exhaust the teacher are interpersonal relationships, other than students in the workplace.

The school principal is in a position to adjust these interpersonal relationships. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (2012) views school principals as representatives of the management, and their leadership role to be that of the key person responsible for managing teachers’ mental health, and providing appropriate support for the teachers. Yamamoto (2013) also states that in order to carry out duties effectively, teachers are partnered with each other, knowing that there is a backup. Support from superiors is crucial, without which the teaching/clerical staff will not be able to demonstrate their abilities.

Gondo (2015) stated that “it is the time when the teacher cannot also put out the SOS including children.” Teachers’ mental health deterioration affects students beyond the aspects of learning. The school principal who is a part of the management may be expected to keep track of the physical and mental condition of teachers at all times, and to demonstrate leadership so that teachers can work on vital educational activities on a daily basis. There are few studies that have focused on the principals’ leadership and teachers’ mental health. It will be necessary to examine this in the future to determine what kind of influence principals’ leadership has on teachers’ mental health maintenance and improvement.

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References


