eCOMMONS

Loyola University Chicago

Loyola eCommons

Master's Theses

Theses and Dissertations

1988

An Examination of Resident Assistant Burnout in Higher Education

Mark William Magis
Loyola University Chicago

Follow this and additional works at: https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_theses

Part of the Education Commons

Recommended Citation

Magis, Mark William, "An Examination of Resident Assistant Burnout in Higher Education" (1988). *Master's Theses*. 3580.
https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_theses/3580

AN EXAMINATION OF RESIDENT ASSISTANT BURNOUT

IN HIGHER EDUCATION

by

Mark William Magis

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School

of Loyola University of Chicago in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

July

1988

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Terry E. Williams and Dr. Gloria J. Lewis for their encouragement, assistance and support in the writing of this investigation. In addition, I would like to thank Dr. Todd Hoover for sharing his expertise in word processing and his assistance in the preparation of this report.

Furthermore, I also wish to thank the various student affairs professionals of both Wheaton College and Loyola University of Chicago for providing me with the opportunities of working in their residence hall programs.

VITA

The author, Mark William Magis, is the son of William Joseph Magis and the late Janet (McClure) Magis. He was born January 17, 1962, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

His elementary education was obtained in the public schools of Arizona. His secondary education was completed in 1980 at Phoenix Christian High School, Phoenix, Arizona.

In August, 1980, Mr. Magis entered Wheaton College in Wheaton, Illinois, receiving the degree of Bachelor of Arts in psychology in May, 1984. In 1982, while attending Wheaton College, he became a resident assistant in a freshmen residence hall, and in the following year he became assistant hall director of that same building.

In August, 1984, Mr. Magis received a graduate assistantship in the housing program at Loyola University of Chicago, enabling him to complete the Master of Arts in community counseling in 1988.

Presently, the author works with emotionally disturbed adolescents as a mental health counselor at Riveredge Hospital in Forest Park, Illinois.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Study

Burning out in one's profession is a phenomenon that
has received a great deal of attention in recent years.
Researchers have spent a vast amount of time examining this
syndrome that places the individual in "a state of
physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion, (that) typically
occurs as a result of long-term involvement with people in
situations that are emotionally demanding" (Pines, 1983, p.
155). In particular, doctors, lawyers, counselors,
educators, and other individuals in the helping professions
have been the focus of numerous studies. In fact, over the
last two decades, over 1,000 articles have been written on
the topics of stress and burnout alone (Riggar, 1985).

Unfortunately, this syndrome exists not only among
professionals but also among other groups as well. Married
couples (Freudenberger & Richelson, 1980), church workers
(Kehl, 1981), and college students (Meier & Schmeck, 1985),
have also been observed as candidates for burnout. In fact,
the research seems to suggest that almost anyone can
experience burnout given the right combination of certain

personality characteristics, job environment, and societal demands.

The focus of this investigation is on college and university residence hall assistants. Having worked in two different residence hall programs in the past six years, this writer has seen this phenomenon adversely affect both co-workers and supervisees. Furthermore, an examination of the professional literature reveals that very little exists that addresses the burnout syndrome as it relates to the resident assistant. Therefore, this investigation seeks to survey the current literature and to develop a guide to aid residence hall professionals in dealing with burnout among resident assistants (RAs).

This investigation is guided by three basic research objectives. The first objective of this research is to identify current models and theories that describe the burnout phenomenon. Researchers, like Freudenberger and Richelson (1980), rely on anecdotal observations to describe the burnout syndrome. On the other hand, some investigators explain this syndrome in terms of empirical evidence (Jackson & Schuler, 1983; Maslach, 1976, 1978a, 1978b; Maslach & Jackson, 1978; Pines, Aronson, & Kafry, 1981; Pines & Maslach, 1978). This investigation thus explores several alternative explanations that various researchers present to define the burnout phenomenon.

A second research objective addresses factors that contribute to burnout in college and university resident

assistants. Several researchers have explored this area in hopes of identifying causative agents responsible for this debilitating syndrome (Carroll, 1981; Dickson, 1981; Nowack, Gibbons, & Hanson, 1985; Nowack & Hanson, 1983). They have examined variables ranging from individual charateristics of the resident assistant to the residence hall environment.

The third research objective for this study examines interventions designed to assist resident assistants experiencing burnout, and, more proactively, the steps that can be taken to prevent burnout. Specifically, this research focuses on what residence hall directors, central housing administrators, and college counselors might do to support resident assistants who are experiencing various burnout symptoms. As studies indicate, a resident assistant experiencing burnout is not only affected psychologically, but physically as well (Nowack & Hanson, 1983; Nowack et al., 1985). Moreover, other investigations (Jackson & Schuler, 1983; Maslach, 1976, 1978a, 1978b) stress the interpersonal problems that are created when an individual experiences burnout. Relationships with clients (students) and co-workers are also negatively affected by this syndrome.

In response to the second part of this third objective, Freudenberger (1974) feels that burnout cannot be prevented, but it can be avoided as much as possible. This investigation presents methodologies which researchers suggest minimize burnout in one's job. Since opinions, like

the above, vary on just what can be done to avert the debilitating effects of burnout, the current investigation summarizes these proactive measures into a guide to assist student affairs professionals in deterring burnout in resident assistants.

Method and Procedure

This study involves a comprehensive review of the professional literature. Materials were located through hand and computer searches utilizing both community and university libraries.

Particular attention was given to journals such as the Journal of College Student Development (1975-1987) and the Journal of Counseling and Development (1975-1987), since several articles on both burnout and resident assistants have appeared in these publications.

Other journals and articles that address the research topic were located through Higher Education Abstracts, Psychological Abstracts, and the ERIC abstract journal, Resources in Education. The search focused on those articles written between the years of 1975-1987 since burnout was first coined by Freudenberger in 1974.

Upon compiling a list of resources from the above sources, additional materials were found through the reference lists of each of the respective articles. These lists were then condensed to those articles most pertinent to this review.

Conceptual Foundation on Burnout

As previously mentioned, over 1000 books and articles have been written on the burnout syndrome over the last several years. However, many of these books and articles contain very little empirical data to support their conclusions. In fact many scholars (e.g. Meier, 1983; Savicki & Cooley, 1982) are somewhat concerned that researchers have relied too heavily on narrative reports and lists of symptoms to describe this condition.

One rationale for why so little empirical research exists regarding burnout is related to the vast number of definitions that have been formulated over the last several years. Reseachers have had a difficult time sorting through the various definitions and settling on one to use for their particular study. Since several different variables (e.g. environment, cultural expectations, individual personality) have been identified as playing a role in the burnout syndrome, investigators are sometimes perplexed in choosing which variables to manipulate in their particular studies. Therefore, this study examines the different definitions and models that have been used to describe burnout, in order to better present this syndrome's history and theoretical basis.

The first person to actually use the term "burnout" was Herbert Freudenberger (1974). He coined the term after years of experience in clinical settings as a psychoanalyst. From both his own personal experiences and those of his

colleagues, Freudenberger defined burnout as "a state of fatigue or frustration brought about by devotion to a cause, way of life, or relationship that failed to produce the expected reward" (Freudenberger & Richelson, 1980, p. 13). In other words, Freudenberger saw this condition as a result of a personality that applied itself toward unrealistic goals. If for some reason the individual is unable to attain some desired aim, then, according to Freudenberger, disappointment and exhaustion would result. Thus, for Freudenberger, the "psychology of the individual" (Farber, 1983, p. 2) is to be emphasized in the burnout process.

On the other hand, other researchers do not soley attribute the burnout phenomemon to the individual's personality style. In fact, researchers such as Christina Maslach (1976, 1978a, 1978b), Ayala Pines (Pines, Aronson, & Kafry, 1981; Pines & Maslach, 1978), Susan Jackson (Jackson & Schuler, 1983; Maslach & Jackson, 1978), and Jerry Edelwich and Archie Brodsky (1980) tend to view the syndrome as having more environmental and organizational factors associated with it. These factors range from the clients with whom counselors work, to organizational structure of the work environment itself. For example, Maslach (1978a) describes the client's role as a contributor in burnout. From such a viewpoint, Maslach defines burnout as "emotional exhaustion resulting from the stress of interpersonal contact" (1978b, p. 56). This definition is echoed by Maslach's colleague, Ayala Pines, who defines

burnout as " a state of physical, emotional, and mental
exhaustion, (that) typically occurs as a result of long-term
involvement with people in situations that are emotionally
demanding" (1983, p. 155). On the other hand, Cherniss
(1980) focuses on how the organization represented by its
administrators and supervisors can place unrealistic
expectations and demands on its workers resulting in stress
and burnout.

Moreover, the environmental emphasis accounts for the
evolution of various definitions since the mid 1970's. In
1974, Freudenberger used a standard dictionary definition
for burnout as it relates to staff members working in
institutions. Once again, he placed heavy emphasis on the
individual. Four years later, Maslach (1978a) stated that
burnout was "best understood (and modified) in terms of the
social and situational sources of job-related stresses"
(Maslach, 1978a, p. 114). Following Maslach, Edelwich and
Brodsky (1980) defined burnout as "a progressive loss of
idealism, energy, and purpose experienced by people in the
helping professions as a result of the conditions of their
work" (p. 14). Then in 1983, Jackson and Schuler combined
these two different approaches and defined burnout as "a
psychological process--a series of attitudinal and emotional
reactions--that an employee goes through as a result of
job-related and personal experiences" (p. 59). In fact in
1985, Riggar suggested that researchers should bring

together all above specifiers and references and thereby
define burnout as a result of poor person-environment fit.

Maher (1983) proposes an energy expansion model to
describe burnout. Like other investigators concerned about
the lack of both empirical data and theoretical foundation
in the burnout literature, Maher sets forth a framework that
accounts for the vast number of ideas that are circulating
regarding the burnout syndrome. What Maher suggests is that
all of the elements of burnout can be summarized in Stephen
Marks' theory of commitment to an activity (1977).

Marks believes that individuals can expand both their
time and energy levels for an activity or role by making a
commitment to that activity or role. In this regard, Marks
operates from a Durkheimian view which argues that human
energy is expandable depending on how individuals
subjectively experience a situation and how they allocate
their time and energy in that situation (Durkheim, 1953).
Unlike Freud (1961), who operates from an energy scarcity
position which holds that individuals' libidos (energy
levels) are limited and can be depleted, Marks believes that
commitment to the role is key. He suggests that this
commitment can be encouraged by the following: if intrinsic
enjoyment is involved, if some type of loyalty exists to the
role or activity partners, if an extrinsic reward is
expected through performance of the role, and if punishment
is avoided by performance of the activity or role. In
addition, Marks believes that it will be difficult for

individuals to remain committed to roles if the above conditions are not present (p. 929).

With the above in mind, Maher re-examined the burnout literature to determine whether any of the cited causes of the syndrome correspond to Marks' conditions. In most cases, the elements cited in earlier articles as contributors to burnout (e.g. poor working conditions, difficult work relationships, absence of significant rewards) related to one of Marks' four conditions. Therefore, Maher concluded that this energy expansion model is a viable alternative to the energy scarcity approach that has been used in the past to examine the burnout syndrome, and that it could also serve as a model for treating individuals with burnout.

Definition of Terms in this Research

Three terms will be used frequently throughout this thesis and because each is open to varying definition, the definitions utilized by this researcher are provided. The terms include burnout, stress, and resident assistant.

Burnout. "A state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion, (that) typically occurs as a result of long-term involvement with people in situations that are emotionally demanding" (Pines, 1983, p.155). This definition originates from a researcher who approaches burnout from an environmental perspective, yet also takes into account individual personality characteristics. In addition, this comprehensive approach appears to be favored by student

affairs reseachers interested in both the physical and the emotional effects of burnout on RA's (Nowack, Gibbons, & Hanson, 1985; Nowack & Hanson, 1983; Phillips & Marriot, 1980).

Stress. Stress and burnout are often thought to be synonymous. However, stress can be defined as "any perceived event that causes demand upon one's mind or body" (Cedoline, 1982, p. 1). Burnout is considered a byproduct of either too much stress or unchecked stress (Farber, 1982), and tends to occur in individuals who do not address the demands that the particular stressors are placing on their bodies.

Residence Hall Assistants. A residence hall assistant (an RA) is usually an undergraduate student paraprofessional who lives on a residence hall floor and functions as a part-time employee of the institution in a number of roles. According to Winston, Ullom, and Werring (1984) these roles include: "peer helper, information and referral agent, socializer, leader and organizer, clerical worker, limit setter, and conflict mediator"(p. 53). While serving in these capacities for resident students, resident assistants are often compensated by receiving room and board and other benefits.

Summary

In summary, this chapter describes the methods and procedures of this literature review. Moreover, this introductory chapter describes the conceptual framework for

burnout and the definitions of terms used in this investigation.

As inferred earlier, burnout definitions and models will continue to be developed as long as researchers believe a need exists for an updated explanation of the syndrome, or until enough empirical evidence is produced to verify one of the present theories. Student affairs professionals in higher education have looked to investigators such as Cherniss (1980), Jackson (Jackson & Schuler, 1983), Maslach (1976) , and Pines (Pines et al., 1981) for background information on burnout and how it relates to resident assistants. They also rely on many of these same researchers for instruments and treatment strategies when dealing with burnout among staff members. The focus of the next two chapters examines how burnout affects resident assistants and what can be done to alleviate or prevent burnout from occurring in the first place.

CHAPTER II

BURNOUT AND THE RESIDENT ASSISTANT POSITION

In this chapter, the focus will be on resident assistants and burnout. The RA position and the problems encountered on the job are described. The burnout syndrome itself is examined as it relates to the RA position and a comprehensive list of symptoms in resident assistants experiencing burnout is presented.

Job Responsibilities of the Resident Assistant

As mentioned in the previous chapter, an individual must assume numerous roles when taking on a position as a resident assistant. With each of these roles comes a number of responsibilitites, all of which have some type of connection with the lives of the residents living on the floor.

Generally, the job of resident assistant involves creating an environment or community that allows for the maximum amount of growth for all the residents involved. This environment will also allow the RA to develop as a person and as a leader. In fact, what this position may specifically entail depends on the type of institution, the

goals of the residential program, the types of students living on the floor, and the expectations of the RA's supervisor (Upcraft, Pilato, & Peterman, 1982). However, according to Upcraft et al. the resident assistant is basically responsible for six different areas of residence life.

The first major responsibility that RAs have to their floors is providing assistance when necessary to the various floor members. In this role, the RA serves as a liaison. This may involve anything from advising residents with academic problems to assisting individuals with roommate disputes. In this capacity, resident assistants not only interact with residents and/or faculty, they also function as a liaison between students and the hall director and central housing staff in terms of representing residents' concerns, needs, and issues. With this in mind, student affairs professionals (Upcraft et al., 1982; Winston et al., 1984) suggest that resident assistants need to continually remember that they are not trained as psychotherapists or counselors and therefore, they should only assume responsibility for that which they have been trained.

Secondly, the RA must also assume certain maintenance duties in order to promote the residents' health and safety (Greenleaf, Forsythe, Godfry, Hudson, & Thompson, 1967). Some of these duties would include: performing routine rounds while on duty, reporting of any broken furnishings on the floor, assessing the common area bathrooms for damage

and disrepair, taking stock of floor supplies, and alerting the custodial staff when a housekeeping concern arises on the floor.

A third area of responsibility for the RA includes facilitating groups. This usually requires the RA to serve as a leader in coordinating different floor activities and meetings. Frierman and Frierman (1981) have referred to this as the "figurehead" (p.457) role of the resident assistant. Often times, this role also involves RA's in asserting authority in the enforcement of institutional rules and policies.

Programming is the fourth area of responsibility that falls under the RAs' list of duties. Winston et al. (1984) would include this under the resident assistant's organizer and socializer roles. With this responsibility, the RA must plan and carry out developmental and social programs that will allow residents to grow and learn in areas outside of the classroom. Programs could include: floor dances, intramural athletic events, discussion groups on relationships with the opposite sex, and so forth.

The fifth area of responsibilty that the RA holds is acting as a disseminator of information or spokesperson for the college or university (Frierman & Frierman, 1981). This may require the RAs to hold regular floor meetings, to attend weekly staff and committee meetings, to post signs, or just being available to answer residents' questions.

Interpreting and enforcing institutional rules and
policies is the sixth and perhaps the most difficult aspect
of the RA position. For the most part, RAs would like to
remain in the positive graces of their residents. However,
times exist when the RAs must assert their authority and
handle infractions of institutional policy. In
confrontation situations like the above, residents' tempers
often flare and their egos are bruised resulting in less
appreciation for RAs who set limits on their behaviors.
Upcraft et al. (1982) refer to this dilemma as the
"so-called cop-counselor conflict" (p. 6).

This sixth responsibility that Upcraft et al. (1982)
describe also requires the RA to serve as a peacemaker.
Others have referred to it as "disturbance handler"
(Frierman & Frierman, 1981, pp. 458, 459). Under either
title, resident assistants attempt to maintain floor
environments that are conducive to studying and sleeping.
Though at times residents may wish to disturb the peace for
one reason or another, the RA's responsibility is to keep
things relatively in order.

In all, the RA position requires a great deal of the
individual's time and attention; time that could be devoted
to studies and attention that could be focused on more
personal matters. Resident assistants can expect to put in
at least 20 hours per week executing job responsibilities.

Work-related Problems Encountered by Resident Assistants

The resident assistant position, like any job, has its own set of problems. Moreover, not all problems involve one's residents for individual RA's may create their own problems, or they may experience difficulties with supervisors and/or co-workers.

A longitudinal study by Shipton and Schuh (1982), between 1971 and 1980, discovered that the most frequent personal problems RA's encountered with residents related to student self-responsibility problems, roommate conflicts, academic difficulties, and alcohol use. These researchers also noted that such problems as drug usage and racial conflicts seemed to be on a decline. However, they were careful to note that this study involved one university, so they cautioned against generalizing from conclusions drawn from this investigation.

In an earlier study by Winkelpleck and Domke (1977), resident assistants ranked vocational choice, test anxiety, loneliness, sexual adjustment, drinking, and peer groups as problems that frequently occurred on their floors. Furthermore, these problems were also topics of interest with which the resident assistants desired to have more assistance. In addition, the RAs surveyed in this study expressed a desire to obtain more assistance in dealing with roommate conflict, depression, and suicide.

In a 1973 study (Fullerton & Potkay), college students at a midwestern university were asked what basic problems

they face. The results indicated that grades were the first pressure with money matters coming in second. The third major problem reported by students involved social adjustment.

After reviewing these studies, it would appear that academics and interpersonal relationships are perhaps some of the most common problems to be reported by college students. In turn, resident assistants will continue to face these issues in the years to come. However, these issues may seem small in comparison to other types of problems that RAs face.

Schuh and Shipton (1983) examined the types of verbal and physical abuse that resident assistants experience during a school year. RAs were asked about both types of abuse and the frequency of occurrence. The results showed that over 50% of the RAs reported having some type of obscenity directed at them. Minority RAs also reported having racial slurs directed at them. In addition, female RAs reported being subject to more sexual slurs than their male counterparts.

In regard to physical abuse, the most frequent forms involved malicious pranks, followed by damage to personal property. Overall, however, the percentage of resident assistants suffering some sort of physical abuse was small (Schuh & Shipton, 1983).

Nevertheless, as was mentioned previously, not all problems are a result of the RA's residents. Both resident

assistants themselves and their co-workers also create work-related problems. Upcraft et al. (1982) state that RAs anticipating their position often worry about adjusting to the job, handling crises on the floor, enforcing rules, doing a good job, relating with their supervisor, and being able to balance their RA position with the rest of their life. Powell, Plyler, Dickson, and McClellan (1969) go into more depth by emphasizing the various "double-bind" situations that resident assistants can get themselves into with their position (i.e. supervisor vs. friend, institutional policy vs. personal values, time for self vs. commitment to others, etc.).

With all the above in mind, one can see that the resident assistant position is not an easy one by any means. The RA role requires an individual who is not only people-oriented, but who can also be flexible enough to deal with a myriad of problems. The next section, will describe what can happen to resident assistants if these problems get out of check and the RA's feel they have no where to turn.

Stress and Burnout and the Resident Assistant

Job-related stress can have drastic effects on a resident assistant, just like anyone else. Stress which remains unchecked could result in RA burnout. When this occurs, not only does the RA suffer, but so does his or her residents and fellow staff members.

Numerous student affairs professionals (e.g. Carroll, 1981; Dickson, 1975, 1981; Durden & Neimeyer, 1986; Hornak,

1982; Miller & Conyne, 1980; Nowack & Hanson, 1983; Phillips & Marriot, 1980; Winston & Buckner, 1984) have explored the impact of stress and burnout on the RA position. The research indicates that the nature of the RA position and its numerous roles is in itself taxing on the individual, since the demands of the RA job can often exceed the coping resources of the individual.

First of all, investigators admit that not much empirical evidence exists regarding the individual factors that contribute to burnout in resident assistants (Nowack et al., 1985). Thus, it may be difficult for professionals to identify burnout among their RA's. However, some studies have assessed the relationship of cognitive hardiness, health habits, and social support with RA burnout.

Nowack and Hanson (1983) found that resident assistants, who had an internal locus of control, were genuinely committed to their work, foresaw change in their life as challenging rather than threatening (cognitive hardiness), and tended to be less prone to burnout and other types of physical illness. These findings were consistent with earlier research; however, they established no causal relationships.

In 1985, Nowack et al. looked at the relationship between social support, health habits, and burnout. They discovered that when RAs practiced good health habits, they experienced less emotional exhaustion. They also found that "the more satisfied the RA's were with their social support

network, the less cynical and the more personal accomplishment they reported" (p. 140).

Other studies have looked at RA perceptions of the job, in order to grasp a better understanding of how burnout relates to resident assistants. For example, Miller and Conyne (1980) found that residence hall paraprofessionals or RAs report significantly more personal problems than do regular college students living in residence halls. In particular, this study described RA complaints regarding not getting enough time for self, having to spend too much time indoors, and worrying a lot about financial concerns. These researchers tried to account for these differences by atttributing them to the job demands of the RA position versus the job expectations and the personal resources of the individual paraprofessional. Miller and Coyne also suggested that these differences may be a result of a willingness for RAs to self-disclose more than the regular student, or the possibility that residence hall positions attract individuals in general who have more problems.

From another perspective, Hornak (1982) examined how a resident assistant's self-defeating thoughts may result in burnout. Hornak postulates that RAs may contribute to their own burnout condition by assuming too much responsibility in their positions, and in result "feel overwhelmed by the emotional intensity of their jobs" (p. 14). In addition, Hornak believes that as long as RAs demonstrate such self-defeating behaviors as overscheduling, not being able

to say no to others, neglecting personal needs, and the like, then they are likely candidates for burnout.

Other researchers (Durden & Neimeyer, 1986) have even looked at the constructs that individual RAs use to interpret their experiences. Durden and Neimeyer's results indicated no significant relationships between tedium, experience, and positivity when examining the job construct ratings from RAs. These researchers concluded that RAs seem to be content with their positions for the most part. However, their findings also appear to indicate that some aspects of the RA position result in stress at various times that tend to manifest themselves in numerous ways, with job burnout being an example. One instance of this involves a comparison between experienced and inexperienced RAs, with experienced RAs being "somewhat less positive about Programming and Live-In Status than their less experienced counterparts" (p. 20).

Individual perceptions and characteristics, however, are not the only influential factors in RA stress and burnout. The type of environment where the resident assistant works also has an effect on the amount of stress that is experienced. Dickson (1975) postulates during his development of the Resident Assistant Stress Inventory that a stressful residence hall environment creates anxiety in the individual RA which can eventually result in RA ineffectiveness. Later, Dickson (1981) discovered that differences exist in the perceived stress levels of RA's for

the following variables: number of students per RA, type of residence hall, the experience of the RA, and the size of the campus housing system. For example, Dickson found RAs reporting higher stress levels on floors of 60 or more residents when it came to values development, emotional resiliency, and counseling skills. Dickson also discovered that in larger housing systems (7,000 residents or more), RAs reported less stress in confrontations than did their smaller system counterparts.

Burnout Symptoms of Resident Assistants

Resident assistants, like any other employee suffering from burnout, display the same basic symptoms. However, few previous studies on resident assistant burnout examine the common signals. One must therefore look to the general research on burnout, in order to develop a comprehensive listing of the warning signs.

Farber (1983) suggests that a consensus exists among researchers concerning the symptoms of burnout. For the most part, all of them believe that burnout symptoms include physical, emotional, and attitudinal components. Other researchers would even add a fourth divison, behavioral manifestations (Patrick, 1979).

Physical symptoms that a student affairs professional should look for among resident assistants include the following: fatigue and exhaustion, chronic or lingering colds, pain in the back or neck, frequent headaches, insomnia, shortness of breath, and gastrointestinal

complaints (Freudenberger, 1974). Other studies indicate that the effects of drug and alcohol abuse could also be considered as physical symptoms of burnout (Maslach, 1976).

With regard to the emotional warning signals, RA supervisors should look for emotional exhaustion and depression. Under such circumstances, resident assistants may possess a feeling of helplessness or they may experience a loss of feeling and concern for the residents with whom they are working. Issues involving a lack of trust are also commonly found among this type of RA (Maslach 1978a, 1978b, 1982). With these in mind, supervisors may find RAs keeping more to themselves. They may also discover RAs abusing various substances, in order to reduce their tension (Freudenberger, 1974; Maslach, 1976).

Carroll and White (1982) identify several additional emotional indicators that supervisors should look for in employees who are experiencing burnout. Among these are undefined fears or fears of "going crazy" (p. 44). These same employees may also experience paranoia, nervous ticks, feelings of being trapped, increased anger, and inability to concentrate.

Attitudinal changes resulting from burnout among RA's include the following: cynicism, expressions of frustration, depersonalization, and attitudes expressing low personal accomplishment. In these cases, the RAs' residents will probably be the ones most affected, or at least the first ones to notice this type of change in their resident

assistant. Maslach (1976) suggests that eventually, this change in attitude will result in a gradual loss of caring for the people with whom the individual comes into contact on the job. In addition, RA's may lose all positive feelings for their residents, and in turn relate to them in derogatory and dehumanizing ways.

Jackson and Schuler (1983) suggest that individuals experiencing burnout may also develop a sense of low personal accomplishment. In their state of despair, these individuals may feel that they have not lived up to their own expectations concerning their jobs. These feelings are often compounded by a sense of frustration that the individuals feel when they realize they have failed to reach their goals. However, what they have actually failed to realize is that their goals and expectations were unrealistic in the first place. This often happens to resident assistants, especially first year RA's who come into the job with delusions of grandeur of what they will be able to accomplish on their floors.

Finally, the burnout syndrome can manifest itself in the behavior of the RA. Typical examples of this include complaining about the job and residents and spending less time on the floor itself (absenteeism). Hornak (1982) even believes that burnout can also affect the RA in her or his academic life, with lower grades being a result. This aspect of the syndrome can also result in the individual abruptly quitting his or her position. In all, the RA is

attempting to distance herself or himself from interpersonal stressors in order to combat the tension and to deal with other aspects of life (i.e. academics). Unfortunately, these attempts serve as only temporary measures and do not actually address the root of the problem.

Summary

In summary, this chapter focuses on the responsibilities and the numerous roles of the resident assistant. Moreover, it addresses the types of problems that the RA encounters in his or her work environment. And finally, this chapter looks at the various ways that stress and burnout have affected resident assistants through an examination of the most recent research.

The chapters which follow will focus on the various individual and environmental interventions that can be undertaken to prevent and treat RA burnout. The implications of this investigation will also be presented.

CHAPTER III

PREVENTION AND TREATMENT OF THE BURNOUT SYNDROME

In this chapter, the focus will be on the proactive and reactive interventions that can be implemented in the prevention and treatment of burnout in resident assistants. More specifically, these interventions will center on how the individual RA and factors in the work environment can inhibit burnout or at least alleviate some of its debilitating effects on RAs.

Separating proactive from reactive interventions in addressing RA burnout remains difficult. The same type of interventions can often be used both before the onset of burnout (prevention) or after burnout symptoms surface (treatment). Since Freudenberger (1974) states that burnout is inevitable in the helping professions, both preventative and treatment interventions are necessary.

Proactive and Reactive Interventions Undertaken by the RA

A meaningful step which resident assistants themselves could take in order to prevent burnout includes examining their job-related goals and expectations. Numerous researchers (Boy & Pine, 1980; Freudenberger & Richelson,

1980; Kehl, 1981; Phillips & Marriot, 1980; Powell et al., 1969; Savicki & Cooley, 1982; Van Auken, 1979; Veninga & Spradley, 1981) have stressed the need for individuals to have realistic goals and expectations when dealing with any job, particularly a complex, multi-role position such as a resident assistantship.

Powell et al. (1969) emphasized the importance of setting realistic goals and expectations for resident assistants. These researchers discovered that resident assistants often carry around a large amount of guilt and anxiety by possessing too many "shoulds." An example of this could be a resident assistant saying to himself or herself, "I should always be available to my residents whenever I am on the floor." RAs may believe that by being more accessible and visible, they can provide more assistance to their residents. Such a goal could increase anxiety in that it places the resident assistant in the precarious position of having to be on call continuously, thus allowing little time for study and recreation. These researchers suggest that by examining and revising their expectations, resident assistants can be more flexible and less absolute on the job. As with the above example, the RA position does not have to become a 24-hour-a-day job.

Van Auken (1979) suggests that youth counselors in general need to remind themselves that they are not "omnipotent" (p. 144). He advises counselors to be realistic in terms of the assistance they can provide.

Overall, he cautions counselors regarding the amount of responsibility that they assume. For example, Van Auken's research would suggest that resident assistants not burden themselves with being the guardian angels of their residents, but rather allow the residents themselves to be responsible for their own behavior within the hall. As previously mentioned, resident assistants need to be reminded continously that they are not trained as counselors or psychotherapists and therefore, they should only assume responsibility for that which they have been trained (Upcraft et al., 1982; Winston et al.,1984).

Freudenberger and Richelson (1980) echo this need for individuals to develop greater self-awareness and an ability to monitor their expectations. They believe expectations need to be based in reality and not in fantasy, otherwise burnout will most likely result. Therefore with resident assistants, it would be important that RA candidates have opportunities to assess their own role expectations during the application process, in order to determine whether their expectations are realistic or not.

For example, resident assistant candidates should be asked to look at their own expectations and level of training as these relate to the types of problems likely to be enountered in the position. They should also become familiar with the various types of support systems that the institution provides before accepting a position that could interfere with their own academic and social needs. In

other words, candidates can better prepare themselves for the RA position by exploring all the variables involved, in order to provide for more realistic expectations and thus a less stressful experience once they are on the job.

Furthermore, once RAs assume their positions and then find themselves suffering from burnout symptoms, they can once again examine and, if needed, revise their goals and expectations. Freudenberger and Richelson (1980) suggest that individuals not take their jobs too seriously. They advise individuals to "update" their goals and expectations when the need arises, so that they might have more fulfilling life experiences (p. 210). For a resident assistant, this process of self-examination may involve a decision of whether or not to return for a second year to the position. The RA may desire to become more involved in other campus organizations the following year and realize that the RA position could interfere with that goal.

Fortunately, resident assistants can also rely on other alternative interventions when attempting to prevent and treat burnout. Researchers suggest other means by which to combat this syndrome such as: time-outs from work (i.e. weekends away, vacations, leaves of absence), maintaining a proper diet with rest and relaxation, physical exercise, establishing other outside interests, and joining support groups (Boy & Pine, 1980; Hendrickson, 1979; Kehl, 1981; Maslach, 1978b; Phillips & Marriot, 1980; Powell et

al., 1969; Van Auken, 1979; Veninga & Spradley, 1981; Watkins, 1983).

The "time-out" may be used in the prevention of burnout. Maslach (1976) suggests that these short breaks from work are sometimes quite effective when dealing with a stressful position. Time-outs are also viewed as a more appropriate form of coping rather than complete withdrawal from a position. Therefore, resident assistants may wish to schedule a short break during those evenings that they are on duty, whereby they can get away from the pressures of their floors for a while. However, if a time-out is not a long enough period of withdrawal, then resident assistants may wish to arrange a short vacation in order to rejuvenate themselves. Long weekends, mid-term breaks, or holidays can serve as appropriate times for RAs to distance themselves from their positions and enjoy time with friends and family. Researchers support the idea of regular vacations with any type of position to alleviate burnout, so resident assistants should take advantage of this intervention (Freudenberger, 1974; Kehl, 1981; Maslach, 1976; Van Auken, 1979).

Still another burnout intervention involves the maintenance of physical health through proper diet, rest, and regular exercise. As mentioned in the first chapter, burnout can have serious effects on one's physical health. Therefore, researchers suggest that individuals do as much as possible to combat the physical and emotional fatigue

associated with this syndrome. Regular exercise serves not only as a diversion from work, but also as a coping mechanism by which individuals can achieve physical conditioning (Freudenberger, 1974; Hendrickson, 1979; Kehl, 1981; Maslach, 1976; Phillips & Marriot, 1980; Veninga & Spradley, 1981). With this in mind, resident assistants may wish to participate in activities such as jogging, swimming, bicycling, or some type of team sport that will benefit their personal wellness.

The fact remains, however, that making time for oneself and developing other interests outside of work serve as two of the most beneficial reactive measures individuals can undertake in dealing with burnout. Research stresses the need for individuals to develop other activities that will provide opportunities for personal renewal and stress reduction (Van Auken, 1979; Veninga & Spradley, 1981). Finding a hobby, meditating, or involving oneself in some other personal project assists in breaking the daily routine of work and reduces boredom (Watkins, 1983). For resident assistants, setting quality time aside for studying, friends, or relaxation will provide opportunities for this type of diversion and personal enrichment.

The most widely suggested strategy for dealing with burnout is the support group. Numerous researchers stress the importance of participating in support networks among both co-workers and with friends and associates outside the workplace (Kehl, 1981; Maslach, 1978b; Phillips & Marriot,

1980; Pines, 1983; Scully, 1983; Spicuzza & De Voe, 1982; Van Auken, 1979; Watkins, 1983). For resident assistants, this strategy might involve associating with outside friends and classmates, as well as participating in support groups with fellow RAs.

Watkins (1983) refers to the above intervention as an "association with healthy souls" (p.308). He believes that from such associations, the individual is able to be rejuvenated both emotionally and physically. He suggests that the time counselors spend with family and friends provides them with a renewed vision of humanity. In addition, he also stresses the need to socialize with one's colleagues, in order to receive support and to enhance personal growth.

Kehl (1981) and Van Auken (1979) echo the need for counselors and youth workers to establish social networks. Kehl warns counselors that they place themselves in vacuums when they neglect to interact with significant others. Van Auken suggests that social networks can provide a forum to vent feelings and obtain new insights into one's practice and position.

Pines (1983) views the social support system as having several functions. Not only do these groups provide individuals with the opportunity to be listened to, but they also assist the person in receiving both technical and emotional challenge and support. Furthermore, these support systems allow individuals to discover that others

share their same problems and concerns, and that together the group members can perform "social reality testing" (p. 159) of their perceptions of their work environment.

For resident assistants, social support networks provide a number of benefits. Not only do they provide RAs with opportunities to spend time with friends to get away from hall responsibilities, but these networks can also assist RAs in learning more about themselves and their positions. For example, such support networks can provide RAs with opportunitites to share stressful and frustrating situations concerning their floors (i.e. roommate conflicts, resident apathy, floor vandalism) and learn new skills to cope with and to manage these problems.

Proactive and Reactive Institutional Interventions
Implemented in the Work Environment

Perhaps the most proactive interventions that an institution of higher education can implement in the prevention of resident assistant burnout involve the selection, training, and supervision of RAs. Several researchers stress the need to review the selection process, to enhance training programs, and to improve the supervision of resident assistants in order to select and sustain those individuals who are best suited for the position (Hornak, 1982; Miller & Conyne, 1980; Nowack & Hanson, 1983; Shipton & Schuh, 1982; Upcraft & Pilato, 1982; Winston et al., 1984).
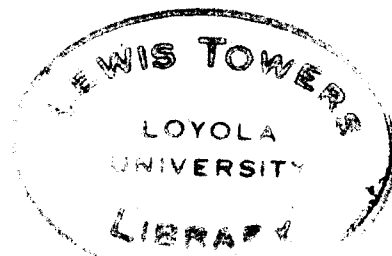
Prior to the selection process, Upcraft and Pilato (1982) emphasize the need for student afffairs professionals within an institution to agree upon the criteria and techniques used in the RA selection process. Winston et al. (1984) suggest that the criteria include "demonstrated academic achievement; a warm, friendly personality; good basic interpersonal skills; emotional stability; ability to cope with stress and ambiguity; and ability to accept people with different values or backgounds" (p.57). Moreover, these criteria have been studied and shown "to correlate positively with successful performance as an RA" (Upcraft & Pilato, 1982, p. 20).

Once the criteria have been established, researchers advise that the selection process begin early enough in the year in order to provide sufficient time for screening and interviewing candidates. They also suggest that it is best to obtain selection input from program administrators, current RAs, and students themselves who know both the housing proram and the job demands (Upcraft & Pilato, 1982).

In addition, for those RAs returning for a second year Nowack and Hanson (1983) advise that during the screening process student affairs professionals explore various characteristics of resident assistants before rehiring them. They suggest that cognitive hardiness, job satisfaction, emotional exhaustion, and commitment to the position be among the variables explored when reviewing candidates for rehire, because these variables have often

been correlated with burnout and low job performance (Kobasa, 1979; Maslach & Jackson, 1982). Consequently, if a candidate for rehire is assessed to be emotionally drained and dissatisfied with his or her position, then the resident assistant selection committee may wish to by-pass her or him and rehire another individual.

Moreover, during the selection process student affairs professionals should also examine the candidates' job expectations as they apply for resident assistant positions. As previously mentioned, researchers suggest that RAs who possess unrealistic goals and expectations concerning their positions often feel guilt and anxiety over unmet expectations which results in added stress (Phillips & Marriott, 1980; Powell et al., 1969). Therefore, student affairs professionals may wish to screen out or provide additional training to those candidates who are potential burnout victims. Thus, the selection process can assist in the early identification of those individuals who may be burnout candidates.

Reseachers agree upon the need for the institution to provide in-service training in areas where resident assistants find themselves lacking in skills and knowledge needed to address job-related problems and stressors. In research specifically dealing with problems of resident assistants experiencing burnout, investigators suggest that additional training is needed in such areas as establishing support networks, coping with stress, time management, and

personal health awareness (Hornack, 1982; Nowack et al, 1985; Nowack & Hanson, 1983).

Once again, support groups rank as one of the primary reactive interventions that institutions can provide in dealing with burnout. Institutions of higher education, as well as other organizations, can assist their employees by providing the necessary framework for these groups to evolve within the workplace. Spicuzza and De Voe (1982) report the benefits of establishing a mutual aid group in the work environment for those employees suffering from the effects of the burnout syndrome. These researchers believe that by providing forums for discussion and socialization, individuals will be provided with both cognitive (i.e. information in the form of films, lectures, reading materials on burnout) and behavioral interventions (i.e. coping skills). In essence, individuals are able to share within a supportive environment their frustration and at the same time the means of coping with these frustrations.

Scully (1983) emphasizes the need to keep the content of these discussions work-related, with the goal being "...to increase staff effectiveness and to build a sense of competence; to help participants feel that they can deal with the stresses that they encounter in their work situation" (p. 188). Moreover, she advises against any form of discussion (i.e. personal issues) that would deviate from this goal. Ultimately, such a group could provide RAs with opportunities to vent feelings and to reduce tension, and in

turn develop new awareness into how to deal with stressful situations on their floors.

Another institutional intervention that can be implemented through in-service training involves stress management workshops. Nowack et al. (1985) emphasize the importance of stress management training in promoting good health habits among resident assistants affected by burnout. However, when it comes to actually establishing a stress management program, researchers differ on the approach. Barrow (1981) suggests that an individualized program be developed according to the different types of stress reactions that the individual experiences. For example, he recommends a one-to-one peer counseling approach consisting of three, one-hour sessions.

On the other hand, Sparks and Ingram (1979) advocate a workshop approach that is geared towards groups. In their approach, participants not only identify work-related stressors and plans of action to reduce stress on the job, but they also examine areas of job satisfaction in order to "...increase participants' satisfaction with their work" (p. 198). Such an approach would probably be beneficial for system-wide resident assistant training or as a series of in-service workshops with individual residence hall staffs.

Still another area where training can provide support to employees undergoing burnout involves time management and leisure therapy. Garte and Rosenblum (1978) discovered that counselors were not always fulfilled through their work.

They found that through leisure awareness workshops, counselors were able to increase their personal and professional effectiveness. Using a small group format, Garte and Rosenblum had participants confront their own attitudes and activities related to work and leisure, and then share alternatives. Small groups of resident assistants could use this format not only to discuss attitudes regarding their position, but also to establish activities outside of their RA duties that are more leisure oriented.

Wiggers, Forney, and Wallace-Schutzman (1982) also promote the need for leisure, especially among residence hall workers who have difficulty balancing their schedules. They endorse, in their training approach, a program that stresses a pursuit of interests that are in contrast to one's work-related interests. They also emphasize a need for effective time management, since student affairs work is known for the long hours put in each day by staff. In other words, these researchers advise individuals to challenge their self-defeating attitudes in order to obtain increased self-awareness and to develop more appropriate schedule planning and goal setting techniques.

Winston and Buckner (1984) discuss the importance of training prior to starting a resident assistant position. In their study, they found that preservice RA training resulted in resident assistants reporting less stress, while training that occurred during the academic year appeared to

have only a "marginal value" (p. 435). However, Winston et al. (1984) do not negate the importance of RA in-service training that takes place during the academic year. They agree with Hornack (1982) that perhaps during these in-service programs, internal problems such as stress and burnout can be addressed.

Upcraft and Pilato (1982) in addressing the issue of resident assistant training discuss the importance of providing practical training. In their quest to develop a training model, these researchers met with RAs to listen to their concerns. They discovered that RAs desire training that focuses on "problems, issues, situations, and dilemmas that...[they] must deal with day to day" (p. 29). Secondly, they found that resident assistants do not want to be trained as just counselors, since the RA position entails several roles. In addition, they discovered that resident assistants want to be taught general skills (i.e. assertiveness training) that can be used in a variety of situations.

Still another area whereby student affairs professionals can assist in the prevention of burnout involves the type of supervision that is provided to RAs by their residence hall directors. Winston et al. (1984) remind supervisors that, first of all, they need to be aware of the stressors that their RAs face and, secondly, they should let them know they are sensitive and supportive of these concerns. For example, hall directors in weekly

meetings with their RAs could assess the present concerns of their staff members and develop a number of strategies to address these issues. Problem solving techniques, team building exercises, and individual one-on-one sessions between the hall director and RA could provide this support.

In addition, Winston et al. (1984) advocate a supervisory style that involves shared responsibilities between the hall director and RAs. Research has found that individuals who possess an increased capacity to make their own decisions often experience a greater sense of power and control which allows them to deal with the stressors in their environment (Jackson & Schuler, 1983). Unfortunately, resident assistants do not possess a great deal of decision making authority in their position, since they must abide by the guidelines and policies of their supervisors and the institution. For instance, a resident assistant would most likely be able to give input into what should be done in terms of a discipline problem on a floor, yet it might ultimately be the hall director's and other housing administrators' decision on what intervention is actually implemented.

Furthermore, the ability to make more decisions in one's position also carries over to increased participation in work, where supervisors allow their employees to make decisions that will ultimately impact their daily activities. Jackson and Schuler (1983) emphasize the value of employee input and the need for supervisors to listen to

it in order to create policies that the employees will more likely abide by on the job. In the case of resident assistants, hall directors would probably make more appropriate policy and rule changes within the hall, if they obtained feedback from their RAS. Moreover, RAs would probably be more willing to enforce these changes and be happier with their positions, if their input was utilized in the decision making process.

Still another area where supervision plays a vital role in the prevention and treatment of burnout involves the assistance hall directors can provide in clarifying the roles of the RA position. If the hall director can remove much of the ambiguity attached to the RA's multi-roled position, then he or she serves to aid the resident assistant in more clearly understanding his or her position and thus hopefully in alleviating some of the role-related stress (Upcraft & Pilato, 1982).

Research also reveals that perceived levels of stress for RAs differ according to "type of residence hall, number of students per RA, the size of campus housing, and the experience of the RA..."(Dickson, 1981, pp. 366-367). For example, men's halls were found to be more stressful for RAs than women's halls when it came to group leadership situations. In addition, new resident assistants reported more stress related to confrontation issues in comparison to their more experienced co-workers.

Thus, with any selection, training, and supervision intervention dealing with burnout, student affairs professionals need to consider the type of residence hall population and/or housing system. Research suggests that RA assistance programs should take into consideration the timing, needs of housing staff members, and the differences and similarities between residence halls, in order to provide more effective assistance (Winkelpleck & Domke, 1977). Some examples of the above could include: pre-service training on group dynamics at the beginning of the school year, RA in-service training on test anxiety just before midterms, and forums on female and male sexuality respective to the type of hall.

Summary

In summary, this chapter focuses on both the proactive and reactive interventions that both resident assistants themselves and their institutions (i.e. staff supervisors) may implement in dealing with the burnout syndrome. It provides specific examples of what individual RAs and student affairs professionals may do in order to prevent and treat burnout's debilitating effects.

The final chapter which follows will summarize this investigation and will cite its limitations. In addition, conclusions concerning this review will be made along with suggestions for further study.

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This final chapter includes a summary of this investigation and its limitations. Conclusions and recommendations are drawn from the literature reviewed and specific suggestions are made concerning further study in this area of burnout and the resident assistant.

Summary

The purpose of this investigation on resident assistant burnout includes three objectives. The first objective sought to identify current models and theories that describe the burnout phenomenon, while the second focused on describing factors that contribute to burnout in college and university resident assistants. The third objective of this study was designed to examine proactive and reactive interventions to assist resident assistants experiencing burnout.

In this study particular attention was given to such theorists as Freudenberger (1974), Maslach (1976, 1978a, 1978b), and Pines (1983) and their definitions of burnout. Pines' definition of burnout was chosen to guide this

43

investigation since it emphasizes the degree to which this syndrome can incapacitate an individual: "a state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion, [that] typically occurs as a result of long-term involvement with people in situations that are emotionally demanding" (1983, p.155). In addition, this definition was selected for its focus on individuals, like RAs, who are in people-helping professions or environments that are emotionally stressful.

For this literature review documents were located through hand and computer searches utilizing both community and university libraries. Particular attention was given to the Journal of College Student Development (1975-1987) and the Journal of Counseling and Development (1975-1987), since several articles on both burnout and resident assistants have appeared in these publications. After a comprehensive bibliography was compiled, it was reviewed and those articles relating to higher education or written by leading researchers in the area of burnout were among those selected for review in this thesis. Articles concerning unrelated professions often associated with burnout (i.e. nurses, lawyers, doctors) were dropped from consideration.

The second research objective, which was addressed in Chapter II, focused on the specific factors that contribute to burnout in college and university resident assistants. The ambiguous nature of the RA position, the work-related problems encountered by resident assistants, and the expectations of RAs were found to be key factors in the

burnout phenomenon. The resident assistant position was defined. Attention was given to the work of Frierman and Frierman (1981) and Upcraft et al. (1982), who described the multiple roles (i.e. maintenance overseer, group facilitator, programmer, disseminator of information, rule enforcer and interpreter, and peacemaker) that resident assistants must assume.

Various stress producing problems that resident assistants encounter in their positions were identified. Roommate conflicts, substance abuse issues, verbal and physical harassment by residents, depression, academic difficulties, financial concerns, and other job-related worries were among the types of problems that RAs typically face. The research that dealt specifically with resident assistant stress and burnout was reviewed (e.g. Carroll, 1981; Dickson, 1975, 1981; Durden & Neimeyer, 1986; Hornak, 1982; Miller & Conyne, 1980; Nowack & Hanson, 1983; Phillips & Marriot, 1980; Winston & Buckner, 1984). Several physical, emotional, attitudinal, and behavioral symptoms of resident assistant burnout were identified. Physical symptoms include fatigue, chronic colds, frequent headaches, gastrointestinal complaints, insomnia, drug and alcohol abuse, and pains in the neck or back. Emotional warning signals included depression, feelings of helplessness, apathy, lack of trust in individuals, paranoia, and increased anger. Moreover, the attitudinal changes resulting from burnout among RAs involved cynicism,

expressions of frustration, depersonalization, and a sense of low personal accomplishment. Finally, behavioral manifestations of this syndrome included absenteeism, complaints about the job and the residents, and lower grades academically.

In Chapter III, the third research objective was addressed. Both proactive and reactive measures that resident assistants as individuals and their institutions can undertake in dealing with burnout were reviewed. The literature emphasized the need for individual RAs to examine their goals and expectations, in order to determine whether they are too idealistic for the RA position (Phillips & Marriot, 1980; Powell et al., 1969; Van Auken, 1979). In addition, the need for support groups, leisure activities, time-outs, and good health practices for resident assistants experiencing burnout was discussed. The research supports these interventions as valuable tools in combatting the hazardous effects of burnout in individuals in that they provide the RA with both social and physical supports and diversions (e.g. Garte & Rosenblum, 1978; Kehl, 1981; Nowack et al., 1985; Phillips & Marriot, 1980; Pines, 1983; Sparks & Ingram, 1979; Wiggers et al., 1982).

Interventions that also involve change within the institutional environment were examined. The research indicated that the selection, training, and supervision of resident assistants could be improved upon in order to secure the best individuals for RA positions (Hornak, 1982;

Miller & Conyne, 1980; Nowack & Hanson, 1983; Upcraft & Pilato, 1982). Furthermore, the need for institutions to provide opportunities for more input from resident assistants concerning their work environment was also emphasized.

Limitations of this Review

This literature review is limited in that it focuses only on a select group of the scores of articles that have been written on the topic of burnout in the last 14 years. As previously stated, Riggar (1985) reported that over 1000 articles have been written on the topics of stress and burnout alone.

A second limitation involves the ambiguity connected with both the resident assistant position and burnout itself. On one hand, student affairs researchers often suggest that the multiple roles that comprise a resident assistant position tend to carry a lot of ambiguity with them (Hornak, 1982; Winston & Buckner, 1984). On the other hand, researchers, such as Meier (1983), suggest "...that we do not know what burnout is or how it relates to other concepts like job satisfaction or depression" (p. 908).

Conclusions and Recommendations

This investigation leads to a number of important conclusions. First, because of the ambiguity of the resident assistant position, this writer urges student affairs professionals to define and clarify the multiple

roles of the position and to establish realistic goals for their resident assistants (Hornak, 1982; Upcraft & Pilato, 1982; Winston & Buckner, 1984). As role ambiguity is lessened housing administrators should be able to select, train, and supervise RAs in such a way that they are less likely to experience burnout. With this in mind, this writer proposes a model that student affairs professionals could use in achieving this aim.

First, in the RA selection process student affairs professionals need to examine the job expectations, coping skills, social supports, and leisure activities of the RA candidates. Interview questions should be designed to determine the candidates' strengths and weaknesses in each of these areas. With this information, selection committees can identify those individuals who are likely to burn out and/or who are in need of additional training before assuming a resident assistant position. Secondly, student affairs professionals should identify and interpret the numerous roles that the candidates will necessarily assume as a resident assistant. During such a dialogue realistic goals and expectations could be formulated to assist RAs in preparing for their positions.

Once the candidates have been selected, student affairs professionals should provide a wide range of pre-service training that not only prepares these individuals for the RA position, but will also assist in the prevention of burnout. This writer proposes that during the

pre-service training periods professionals address such topics as realistic goal setting, the value of support groups, personal wellness, a need for leisure activities, time management, and stress management.

A substantial amount of research indicates that individuals can do much to prevent burnout by setting realistic goals and expectations for themselves (Freudenberger & Richelson, 1980; Hornak, 1982; Kehl, 1981; Phillips & Marriot, 1980; Powell et al., 1969; Van Auken, 1979). This writer has witnessed the effects of burnout on RAs who did set unrealistic and thus unattainable goals. Thus, all RA candidates should be required to carefully assess their own goals and expectations for the position prior to service. Once they obtain their positions, they need to continue to re-evaluate their goals and expectations on a continual basis. Such assessments could be done in support groups where RAs can receive feedback regarding their goals and expectations and also experience other benefits such as increased self-awareness and emotional challenge and support (Pines, 1983).

This writer also strongly recommends that planned programs related to leisure activities, personal wellness, time management and stress management be incorporated into the daily lives of RAs and their supervisors. During pre-service training periods, basic information should be provided to RAs to assist them in developing their own

regimen of coping mechanisms to deal with the stress encountered within the RA position.

Throughout the school year, student affairs professionals should provide resident assistants with in-service training on nutrition, physical exercise programs, relaxation training, and developing outside interests, in order to both prevent and treat burnout. These in-service programs not only provide important reminders to RAs regarding what transpired during the pre-service training, but they also teach new skills to those RAs who currently may be suffering from burnout. For example, outside interests have been found to increase personal and professional effectiveness since they create opportunities for individuals to achieve fulfillment outside of work (Garte & Rosenblum, 1978). In addition, good health practices and exercise promote physical conditioning which can combat the physical and emotional exhaustion of burnout (Freudenberger, 1974). The above proposed interventions do have a significant effect in rejuvenating the lives of those individuals suffering from burnout.

Finally, in regard to RA supervision this writer strongly advocates an open dialogue be nurtured between resident assistants and their hall directors. Formal supervision meetings on a weekly basis should be dedicated not only to addressing problems on the floors and concerns over job performance, but they should also provide the challenge and support that is often found in the

forementioned support groups. Supervisors need to be assertive in helping RAs clarify their goals and expectations, as well as their need for personal wellness. On the other hand, RAs need to be assertive in seeking out clarification regarding concerns about their position and their supervisor's expectations. Therefore, if both sides communicate openly, then both resident assistants and hall directors might alleviate some of the undue, job-related frustration that eventually leads to burnout.

Suggestions for Further Study

First, it appears that the research on burnout itself, lacks "...substantial empirical support and precise theoretical foundations" (Meier, 1983, p. 900). Therefore, it is difficult for researchers to develop a precise approach to the topic when so many definitions and models exist that attempt to explain it. This writer encourages additional empirical investigations in order to establish a more reliable conceptual framework concerning this phenomenon. Several investigators have called for additional research focusing on how various variables "...such as social support, exercise, and supervisory behavior directly and indirectly influence burnout and job performance..." (Nowack & Hanson, 1983, p.549). Since these interventions have been used in the treatment and prevention of burnout, student affairs professionals need to possess a clearer understanding of how to intervene with those individual RAs who are suffering from burnout by

investigating the nature of any causal relationships that might exist.

For example, this writer did not find any research that examined the support systems of resident assistants who are experiencing burnout. Therefore, it would be beneficial to examine the different types of support networks that are available to resident assistants (i.e small group experiences, peers, family members, and co-workers) to determine the type of impact that these may have in the prevention and treatment of burnout.

Another research area that should be explored is the effect of different types of exercise programs on RAs suffering from burnout. This writer has experienced the benefits of regular exercise as a measure to combat burnout. Intramural sports, aerobic activities, jogging, and weight training serve as means by which college students may increase their physical conditioning. Future investigations should focus on the efficacy of these activities in preventing the physical and emotional exhaustion that accompanies burnout.

In addition, researchers should examine whether a specific type of supervisory style is most effective in preventing burnout among RAs. Winston et al. (1984) suggest that a number of styles exist (ie, maternalistic, authoritarian, laissez faire, synergistic). Therefore, a study focused on these different supervisory styles and their effect on the level of support that resident

assistants receive in dealing with job-related stress should be undertaken.

Finally, this writer recommends that a longitudinal study be conducted with a group of resident assistants who are rehired for additional years of service. This writer has observed an increase of burnout among those RAs who return for a second and third year. Therefore, it would be beneficial to examine the contributing factors that lead to burnout among returning RAs by following them through their tenure.

References

Barrow, J. C. (1981). Educational programming in
     stress managament. Journal of College Student
     Personnel, 22, 17-22.

Boy, A. V., & Pine, G. J. (1980). Avoiding counselor
     burnout through role renewal. Personnel and
     Guidance Journal, 59, 161-163.

Carroll, D. M. (1981). The relationship between
     training, locus of control, experience and
     job-related stress of university resident advisors.
     Dissertation Abstracts International, 42,
     3454A-3455A.

Carroll, J. F., & White, W. L. (1982). Theory building:
     Integrating individual and environmental factors
     within an ecological framework. In W. S. Paine
     (Ed.), Job stress and burnout: Research theory,
     and intervention perspectives (pp. 41-60). Beverly
     Hills, CA: Sage Publications.

Cedoline, A. (1982). Job burnout in public education.
     New York: Teachers College, Columbia University.

Cherniss, C. (1980). Staff burnout. Beverly Hills,
     CA: Sage Publications.

Dickson, G. L. (1975). The development and the preliminary application of the resident assistant stress inventory. <u>Dissertation Abstracts International</u>, <u>36</u>, 2497A-2498A.

Dickson, G. L. (1981). The resident assistant stress inventory 1975-1979: A longitudinal study. <u>Journal of College Student Personnel</u>, <u>22</u>, 362-367.

Durden, M. C., & Neimeyer, G. J. (1986). Construct systems of resident assistants: How they perceive their jobs. <u>Journal of College and University Student Housing</u>, <u>16</u>(2), 18-23.

Durkheim, E. (1953). <u>Sociology and philosophy</u>. New York: Free Press.

Edelwich, J., & Brodsky, A. (1980). <u>Burn-out: Stages of disillusionment in the helping professions</u>. New York: Human Sciences Press.

Farber, B. A. (1983). Introduction: A critical perspective on burnout. In B. A. Farber (Ed.), <u>Stress and burnout in the human service professions</u> (pp. 1-22). New York: Pergamon Press.

Freud, S. (1961). <u>Civilization and its discontents</u>. New York: W. W. Norton.

Freudenberger, H. J. (1974). Staff burn-out. <u>Journal of Social Issues</u>, <u>30</u>(1), 159-165.

Freudenberger, H. J., & Richelson, G. (1980) <u>Burn-out: The high cost of high achievement</u>. New

York: Bantam Books.

Frierman, H., & Frierman, D. (1981). The managing resident assistant. Journal of College Student Personnel, 22, 457-460.

Fullerton, J. S., & Potkay, C. R. (1973). Student perceptions of pressures, helps, and psychological services. Journal of College Student Personnel, 14, 355-361.

Garte, S. H., & Rosenblum, M. L. (1978). Lighting fires in burned-out counselors. Personnel and Guidance Journal, 57, 158-160.

Hendrickson, B. (1979). Principals: Your job is a hazard to your health. Education Digest, 45(1), 17-19.

Hornak, J. (1982). Resident assistant burnout: A self-defeating behavior. Journal of College and University Student Housing, 12(2), 14-16.

Jackson, S.E., & Schuler, R.S. (1983). Preventing employee burnout. Personnel, 60, 58-68.

Kehl, D. G. (1981). Burnout: The risk of reaching too high. Christianity Today, 25(20), 26-28.

Kobasa, S. (1979). Stressful life events, personality and health: An inquiry into hardiness. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 37, 1-11.

Maher, E. L. (1983). Burnout and commitment: A

theoretical alternative. Personnel and Guidance Journal, 61, 390-393.

Marks, S. R. (1977). Multiple roles and role strain: Some notes on human energy, time, and commitment. American Sociological Review, 42, 921-936.

Maslach, C. (1976). Burn-out. Human Behavior, 5(9), 16-22.

Maslach, C. (1978a). The client role in staff burnout. Journal of Social Issues, 34(4), 111-124.

Maslach, C. (1978b). Job burnout: How people cope. Public Welfare, 36(2), 56-58.

Maslach, C. (1982). Understanding burnout: Definitional issues in analyzing a complex phenomenon. In W.S. Paine (Ed.), Job stress and burnout: Research, theory, and intervention perspectives (pp.29-40). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.

Maslach, C., & Jackson, S. E. (1978). Lawyer burnout. Barrister, 5(20), 52-54.

Maslach, C., & Jackson, S. E. (1982). Maslach burnout inventory (MBI): Research edition. Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologists Press.

Meier, S. T. (1983). Toward a theory of burnout. Human Relations, 36, 899-910.

Meier, S. T., & Schmeck, R. R. (1985). The burned-out college student: A descriptive profile. Journal of College Student Personnel, 26, 63-69.

Miller, C.J., & Conyne, R. K. (1980). Paraprofessional
    problems: A comparison of residence hall
    paraprofessionals and regular students. Journal
    of College and University Student Housing,
    10(1), 10-12.

Nowack, K. M., Gibbons, J. M., & Hanson, A. L. (1985).
    Factors affecting burnout and job performance of
    resident assistants. Journal of College Student
    Personnel, 26, 137-142.

Nowack, K. M., & Hanson, A. L. (1983). The relationship
    between stress, job performance, and burnout in
    college student resident assistants. Journal of
    College Student Personnel, 24, 545-550.

Patrick, P.K. (1979). Burnout: Job hazard for health
    workers. Hospitals, 87-90.

Phillips, T. J., & Marriot, K. A. (1980). Burnout.
    Student Activities Programming, 13(1), 36-39.

Pines, A. (1983). On burnout and the buffering effects
    of social support. In B. A. Farber (Ed.), Stress
    and burnout in the human service professions. New
    York: Pergamon Press.

Pines, A., Aronson, E., & Kafry, D. (1981). Burnout:
    From tedium to personal growth. New York: The Free
    Press.

Pines, A., & Maslach, C. (1978). Characteristics of
    staff burnout in mental health settings. Hospital

and Community Psychiatry, 29, 233-237.

Powell, J. R., Plyler, S. A., Dickson, B. A., & McClellan, S. D. (1969). The personnel assistant in college residence halls. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Riggar, T. F. (1985). Stress burnout: An annotated bibliography. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.

Savicki, V., & Cooley, E. J. (1982). Implications of burnout research and theory for counselor educators. Personnel and Guidance Journal, 60, 415-419.

Scully, R. (1983). The work-setting support group: A means of preventing burnout. In F. A. Farber (Ed.), Stress and burnout in the human service professions (pp. 188-197). New York: Pergamon Press.

Schuh, J. H., & Shipton, W. C. (1983). Abuses encountered by resident assistants during an academic year. Journal of College Student Personnel, 24, 428-432.

Shipton, W. C., & Schuh, J. H. (1982). Counseling problems encountered by resident assistants: A longitudinal study. Journal of College Student Personnel, 23, 246-252.

Sparks, D., & Ingram, M. J. (1979). Stress prevention and management: A workshop approach.

Personnel and Guidance Journal, 58, 197-200.

Spicuzza, F. J., & De Voe, M. W. (1982). Burnout in
   the helping professions: Mutual aid groups as
   self-help. Personnel and Guidance Journal,
   61, 95-99.

Upcraft, M. L., & Pilato, G. T. (1982). Residence
   hall assistants in college: A guide to selection,
   training, and supervision. San Francisco, CA:
   Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Upcraft, M. L., Pilato, G. T., & Peterman, D. J.
   (1982). Learning to be a resident assistant. San
   Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Van Auken, S. (1979). Youth counselor burnout.
   Personnel and Guidance Journal, 58, 143-144.

Veninga, R. L., & Spradley, J. P. (1981). How to cope
   with "job burnout". Reader's Digest, 119(716),
   109-112.

Watkins, C. E. (1983). Burnout in counseling practice:
   Some potential professional and personal hazards of
   becoming a counselor. Personnel and Guidance
   Journal, 61, 304-308.

Wiggers, T. T., Forney, D. S., & Wallace-Schutzman, F.
   (1982). Burnout is not necessary: Prevention and
   recovery. NASPA Journal, 20(2), 13-21.

Winkelpleck, J. M., & Domke, J. A. (1977). Perceived
   problems and assistance desired by residence hall

staff. <u>Journal of College Student Personnel</u>,
<u>18</u>, 195-199.

Winston, R. B., & Buckner, J. D. (1984). The effects
of peer helper training and timing on reported
stress of resident assistants. <u>Journal of College
Student Personnel</u>, <u>25</u>, 430-436.

Winston, R. B., Ullom, M. S., & Werring, C. J. (1984).
Student paraprofessionals in residence halls. In S.
Ender, & R. Winston (Eds.). <u>Using students as
paraprofessional staff</u> (pp 51-63). San Francisco,
CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Approval Sheet

The thesis submitted by Mark William Magis has been read and approved by the following committee:

Dr. Terry Williams, Director
Associate Professor,
Educational Leadership and Policy Studies,
Loyola University of Chicago

Dr. Gloria J. Lewis Ph.D.
Associate Professor,
Counseling and Educational Psychology,
Loyola University of Chicago

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated and that the thesis is now given final approval by the Committee with reference to content and form.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Community Counseling.

July 11, 1988
Date

Terry E. Williams
Director's Signature