

The least important factor to the gifted students was Socioeconomic Forces. Although this factor was not rated highly, it should be recognized that the perceived expense of the institution is a possible factor in selection, and it may be more important in the decisions of gifted minority students.

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# The Relationship Between Stress, Job Performance, and Burnout in College Student Resident Assistants

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*This study examined the relationship of stress, personality characteristics, and cognitive appraisal to job performance, burnout, and physical illness in resident assistants.*

During the past two decades an abundance of research has established the existence of a positive relationship between major life events and health status. This relationship, however, has generally been weak, with correlations in the 0.10 to 0.30 range (Kobasa, 1979). Consequently, researchers have begun to focus on mediating variables that help individuals avoid the potentially deleterious impact of perceived stress on health and productivity. Such variables include social support, health negligence behaviors, personality characteristics, family con-

stitution, cognitive hardiness, and coping skills (Kobasa, 1979; Lazarus, 1966; Maslach & Jackson, 1982). This study of resident assistants focused on the role of cognitive hardiness and personality characteristics as factors that buffer individuals against burnout and illness in the face of stressful life events.

Few studies have examined the integrated role of these mediating variables on outcomes of burnout, illness, and job performance, and fewer researchers have studied populations in the human service area. Several researchers, however, have defined constructs that might help in understanding how such variables directly and indirectly affect productivity and well being.

Greenberg (1981) recently demonstrated a significant and positive association between life

events and symptoms of illness in a college student population. Thus, other recent stress-illness findings also seem to be generalizable to the part-time student population used in this study.

Kobasa (1979), integrating various theoretical and empirical leads, proposed the construct of cognitive hardiness. This hardiness construct represents a constellation of the cognitive dimensions that function to minimize the appraisal of daily work and life stress. Individuals possessing a hardy cognitive appraisal of their world (i.e., those with internal locus of control, a genuine and vigorous commitment toward their work and life, and a view of change in their lives as challenging rather than threatening) seem to remain healthier, particularly when experiencing considerable life stress (Kobasa, 1979). Whether this particular mediating variable also acts to protect individuals from other stress outcomes, such as burnout and poor job performance, has not been adequately demonstrated.

The construct of burnout has been most clearly delineated by Maslach and Jackson (1982). They defined burnout as a construct characterized by exhaustion, cynicism, negativity, low commitment, and feelings of lack of personal accomplishment, fatigue, and low productivity. They recently developed the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) (Maslach & Jackson, 1982), which measures three independent burnout dimensions: (a) emotional exhaustion, (b) depersonalization, and (c) personal accomplishment. Some promising associations between burnout, symptoms of illness, and job-related variables have been established using this scale.

Considerable attention has recently focused on the role of the Type A behavioral pattern (TABP) on health and well being (Glass, 1977). This overt behavioral style characterizes an individual who is hard-driving, concerned about time urgency, impatient, competitive, and hostile when perceiving environmental events as challenging, stressful, or threatening. This behavioral pattern has been shown to be significantly related to the development of coronary disease and hence is an important variable to be included in stress research studies (Glass, 1977). For example, Suls (1979) demonstrated that life events that induce helplessness are more strongly associated with symptoms of psychological distress in Type A individuals than in others.

Relatively few studies focus on the role of the Type A pattern on evaluations of job performance and productivity. Several investiga-

tions, highlighting the achievement-striving facet of this behavioral pattern, suggest that a positive relationship should be expected between these variables. For example, Type A students reported that they studied harder, received more academic and athletic awards, were more involved in extracurricular activities, placed greater emphasis on academic success, and actually achieved higher grade point averages than their Type B counterparts (Glass, 1977; Ovcharchyn, Johnson, & Petzel, 1982).

This study examined the interaction of this behavioral pattern with stress and its effect on job performance. The independent variables of stress, cognitive hardiness, and the TABP were assessed for their impact on the frequency and severity of illness, level of burnout, and evaluations of job performance.

This 10-month, retrospective study involved 37 resident assistants (RAs) working in the UCLA residence halls. It was hypothesized that RAs possessing a cognitively hardy outlook would experience significantly less illness and burnout in the face of life stress. It was also expected that RAs who reported that they exhibited the Type A pattern would receive the highest evaluations of job performance from their floor members because of the hard driving and achievement-striving characteristics of this behavioral style. Finally, it was expected that burnout would be positively associated with frequency of physical illness but negatively related to evaluations of RA job performance.

## METHOD

### Participants

Participants for this study were undergraduate resident assistants under contract with the Office of Residential Life on a part-time basis. The RA position requires live-in work responsibilities including programming, community development, advising, enforcing rules and regulations, and administrative duties. Approximately 25% of the RAs were returning for a 2nd year. The mean age was 20, and the majority of the RAs were juniors (46%) and seniors (54%).

The residence hall system at UCLA includes five halls with approximately 4,300 students. Each hall is administered by an assistant dean and is staffed with 2 to 17 RAs. The halls range in size from 335 to 1,300 residents. The RA-student ratio is about 70 to 1.

## Procedure

In spring 1982 the RAs were sent a 221-item questionnaire and a cover letter asking them to participate anonymously in a research study on the impact of the RA job on health and work performance. Approximately 70% of the RAs completed the questionnaire, resulting in a final sample size of 37.

## Instrumentation

Self-reported perceptions of stress were measured using a college version of the Social Readjustment Rating Scale (Holmes & Rahe, 1967). This 43-item questionnaire defines stress in terms of adjustment to major life events. The frequency of stressful life events experienced during this 10-month period ( $M = 11.5$ ,  $SD = 5.70$ ) was qualitatively similar to other findings with student populations (Greenberg, 1981; Masuda & Holmes, 1981). Over 40% of the respondents reported that they experienced changes in eating and nutritional habits, sleeping schedule, living conditions, personal habits, recreational habits, and social activities.

Illness was measured using a shortened version of the Seriousness of Illness Scale (Wyler, Masuda, & Holmes, 1968). The RAs were asked to report all illnesses experienced during the last academic year while employed as a staff member ( $M = 11.5$ ,  $SD = 5.71$ ). This checklist of 94 commonly recognized physical and mental symptoms and diseases has been widely used in other stress studies. Reproducibility of this scale was demonstrated by the test-retest method using the Spearman rank order correlation coefficient (Spearman's rho), which was highly significant at 0.987 (Wyler et al., 1968).

The Type A behavioral pattern was assessed using the Bortner Type A Rating Scale (Bortner, 1969). This 14-item, semantic differential scale agrees significantly (64% to 70%) with other validated measures of the Type A behavioral pattern. It was used to assess the overt characteristics of Type A behavior ( $M = 192.9$ ,  $SD = 35.66$ ).

Burnout was measured using a modified version of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach & Jackson, 1982). This inventory consists of three dimensions: emotional exhaustion (EE), depersonalization (DP), and personal accomplishment (PA). These three scales showed a high level of internal consistency with each other. Estimates of Cronbach's alpha were 0.90 for

EE, 0.79 for DP, and 0.71 for PA. Test-retest reliabilities ranged from 0.60 to 0.80 for these scales. Although no comparative part-time norms have been established for this inventory, levels of burnout in the RAs (EE:  $M = 17.35$ ,  $SD = 8.83$ ; DP:  $M = 6.60$ ,  $SD = 6.13$ ; PA:  $M = 36.28$ ,  $SD = 6.02$ ) seemed to be low to only slightly moderate overall (Maslach & Jackson, 1982).

Cognitive hardiness was measured using three separate inventories that measure the hardiness dimensions of control, challenge, and commitment. A total cognitive hardiness score was derived by summing the z scores over the three dimensions. The disposition of control was measured by the Locus of Control Scale (Rotter & Sceman, 1962). In the case of commitment, the Alienation from Work scale of the Alienation Test was used (Maddi, Hoover, & Kobasa, 1979). Across various adult samples this scale has shown an average internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) of 0.79 (Maddi et al., 1979). Test-retest stability was 0.70 over two administrations separated by a 3-week period (Maddi et al., 1979). High scores on this scale reflected a lack of commitment and involvement with the RA job. Finally, the disposition of challenge was determined using the 22-item Sensation Seeking Scale (Zuckerman, 1964). Individuals scoring high on this dimension are likely to view change in their life as challenging rather than threatening. Across various samples this scale has shown an average internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) of 0.71 (Zuckerman, 1964). Previous research has shown that individuals low in sensation seeking experienced a significant relationship between negative life events and symptoms of illness (Smith, Johnson, & Saranson, 1978).

Job performance was assessed by having floor members evaluate their RAs using a standardized 16-item questionnaire. This evaluation assessed the RAs on their extent of availability, interpersonal sensitivity, programming, floor participation, advising, interpersonal interaction, and enforcement of rules and regulations. This measure was scored on a 5-item scale ranging from *very rarely* (1) to *very frequently* (5). Included were such items as "My RA is available when needed," and "My RA is well informed about campus events and resources and is able to refer individuals with problems or concerns to the appropriate campus office." A total composite score for job performance was derived by averaging the floor members' ratings for their RAs. In general, about 40% of the floor

TABLE 1  
Intercorrelations Among the Variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Emotional exhaustion		0.56*	-0.19	-0.10	0.27*	-0.29*	-0.40*	0.31*
2. Depersonalization			-0.48*	0.01	0.35*	-0.44*	-0.53*	0.24
3. Personal accomplishment				0.31*	-0.16	0.39*	0.33*	0.19
4. Stress					0.25	0.07	0.14	0.30*
5. Illness						-0.60*	-0.38*	0.07
6. Cognitive hardiness							0.29*	0.03
7. Job performance								-0.34*
8. Type A								

Note.  $df = 36$ .  
\* $p < 0.05$ .

members returned these evaluations for each RA. Thus, on the average, each RA was evaluated by approximately 25 floor members. The volunteer nature of this evaluative pool must be considered when interpreting the results of this study.

## RESULTS

To determine the interrelationships among the research variables, Pearson product-moment correlations were computed. Table 1 summarizes these intercorrelations.

Stress and illness variables were positively but not significantly related ( $r = 0.25$ ,  $p > 0.06$ ). There was a significant relationship between frequency and severity of stress ( $r = 0.96$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). A similar positive and significant relationship was found between frequency and severity of the burnout dimensions (EE:  $r = 0.83$ ; DP:  $r = 0.88$ ; and PA:  $r = 0.76$ ; all  $ps < 0.01$ ).

### Cognitive Hardiness, Illness, and Burnout

To test the hypothesis that cognitively hardy RAs had less illness and burnout, two stepwise multiple regression analyses were performed with stress, cognitive hardiness, and Type A behavior as independent variables and illness and burnout as dependent variables. This permitted an examination of the incremental variance attributed to these mediating variables beyond that of life stress.

Consistent with previous findings, cognitive hardiness was found to be significantly associated with both frequency and severity of illness, accounting for approximately 35% of the variance. Frequency of stress was also found to

contribute significantly to this particular regression equation on the first step ( $F = 4.51$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ).

Analysis of the regression data with respect to the burnout dimensions revealed significant findings. Cognitive hardiness was found to be positively and significantly associated with both severity and frequency of the depersonalization ( $F = 7.67$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ;  $F = 6.84$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) and personal accomplishment ( $F = 5.97$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ;  $F = 4.81$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) dimensions of burnout. A significant relationship was also observed for severity but not frequency of the emotional exhaustion dimension ( $F = 3.36$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ;  $F = 2.69$ ,  $p > 0.05$ , respectively). That is, cognitively hardy RAs were no more likely to be buffered against becoming emotionally exhausted than other RAs, as predicted.

### Job Performance

To test the hypothesis that Type A RAs would receive the highest job performance evaluations from their floor members, stepwise multiple regression analyses were repeated with job performance as the dependent variable. Table 2 summarizes these results.

Stress, illness, burnout, and the Type A behavioral pattern contributed significantly toward the prediction of RA job performance and cumulatively accounted for over 46% of the variance in this dependent variable. The negative relationship ( $r = -0.34$ ,  $p < 0.05$ , 2-tailed) between these variables did not support the original hypothesis that Type A individuals would be given the highest overall job performance evaluations. Although these regression analyses should be interpreted cautiously, they support the notion that RAs rating themselves as Type

**TABLE 2**  
**Stepwise Multiple Regression with Job Performance as the Predictor Variable**

Step	Variable	R <sup>2</sup>	R <sup>2</sup> increase	F
1	Burnout (DP)	0.27	0.27	5.41*
2	Type A	0.33	0.05	5.40*
3	Stress	0.38	0.05	4.80*
4	Illness	0.45	0.07	4.20*

Note. *df*=36.

\**p* < 0.05.

As were likely to be viewed less favorably by their floor members.

The findings that high levels of burnout and illness were significantly and negatively associated with job performance were, however, consistent with original predictions. Thus, RAs experiencing the greatest amount of illness and the highest levels of burnout were also most likely to be evaluated lowest in terms of job performance.

## DISCUSSION

The results must be viewed carefully because of the relatively small student sample. Although no causal relationships can be established, the findings are consistent with the explanation that cognitive hardiness serves to buffer individuals against both burnout and physical illness in the face of stressful life events.

The most surprising result of this study was the finding that RAs rating themselves as Type A received significantly poorer job performance ratings from their floor members than did other RAs. It is important to note that the RA job places emphasis on communications, interpersonal interactions, resolution of conflicts, and human relations skills rather than exclusively stressing task or product outcomes. Perhaps the Type A style is perceived to be less attractive when the role expectations of the position involve supportive, empathetic, and understanding behavioral responses to helping situations. Whether the overt characteristics of this behavioral pattern are less effective in human service roles remains to be more thoroughly evaluated in future studies.

What can be done to prevent RA burnout and illness in the face of work and life stress? Several suggestions based on this study may be helpful for residential life departments employing RAs:

1. Identify RAs who are encountering considerable stress and coping poorly with the job. Such staff members will tend to experience greater levels of burnout and illness, which may, in turn, affect job performance.
2. Carefully screen returning RAs on the dimensions of burnout and hardiness before hiring for another year. Use interviews and questionnaires to assess their levels of emotional exhaustion, job satisfaction, commitment, depersonalization, and the extent to which the position remains challenging.
3. Incorporate stress management and related training topics as part of RA staff development programs. Such training should help to minimize and prevent RA burnout (Barrow, 1981).

Further research is needed to clarify how other mediating variables such as social support, exercise, and supervisory behavior directly and indirectly influence burnout and job performance in the face of work and life stress. Continued efforts to study and diminish the negative aspects of job stress will result in enhancement of the RA experience.

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## The Awareness, Impressions, and Use of a Campus Women's Center by Traditional and Nontraditional Women Students

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*Traditional and nontraditional women students were surveyed about their awareness, use, and impressions of a women's center at one university.*

The impact of retrenchment in higher education falls most heavily on poorly funded and staffed programs that are least able to afford reductions in already meager budgets. Campus-based women's centers and their equivalent fit this category. A national survey of college women's centers found that most operate with limited fiscal and human resources; less than half had more than two paid staff members, and only 40% had a budget of more than \$5,000 (Sweeney, 1978).

Despite these constraints, women's centers have tried to appeal to a diverse group of women and have attempted to meet a wide range of their needs and concerns (Girard, 1977; Stimpson et al., 1971). This approach, which has often con-

flicted with financial reality, has been defended on the grounds that it is necessary to marshal the support of large numbers of women to bring about institutional change. Women's centers have sought to bridge the age, status, and life-style differences among women by offering programs and services that will attract students, faculty, professional and nonprofessional staff, spouses, and members of the local community. This strategy risks spreading the small resources of these organizations so thin that all the centers' efforts are weakened. A strong argument can be made for emphasizing those programs and services that have greatest relevance to the individuals the center considers its primary constituency and for reducing or eliminating activities deemed peripheral.

Colleges and universities that finance women's centers primarily from student fees have an obligation to direct services chiefly, if not ex-