CHRONIC EMBITTERMENT

Dr Janet Ballard EAPH, December 2010

EMBITTERMENT

An emotion encompassing persistent feelings of being let down, insulted or being a loser, and of being revengeful but helpless

Linden, M (2003)

Special Article

Psychotherapy and Psychosomatics

Psychother Psychosom 2003;72:195–202 DOI: 10.1159/000070783

Posttraumatic Embitterment Disorder

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CHRONIC EMBITTERMENT: COMMON FEATURES

HISTORY	
 Manifests itself in the context of a relationship (in the broadest sense) that has 'gone wrong' 	
 Event(s) cited as evidence of having been let down or badly treated by superiors or by the organisation as a whole 	
 Lack of resolution of event(s) 	
 Present distress attributed directly to event(s) 	
 Strong convictions about fairness, justice or anticipated support 	

CHRONIC EMBITTERMENT: COMMON FEATURES

HISTORY	PRESENTATION
 Manifests itself in the context of a relationship (in the broadest sense) that has 'gone wrong' 	 Anger, focussed on the organisation or an individual within it
 Event(s) cited as evidence of having been let down of badly treated by superiors or by the organisation as a whole 	 Strong sense of injustice or unfairness Prominent ruminations
 Lack of resolution of event(s) 	 Affective modulation preserved
 Present distress attributed directly to event(s) 	 (Often also need to recount events in detail)
 Strong convictions about fairness, justice or anticipated support 	

CHRONIC EMBITTERMENT: Possible contributory factors

PERSONAL	SITUATIONAL/ ORGANISATIONAL
 Strong personal aspirations (especially strong principles and sense of justice) Perceived breach of the psychological work contract ?Particular personality traits 	 Nature of precipitating event(s) Attempts to resolve the precipitating events and their aftermath Lack of adequate attention to organisational justice

CHRONIC EMBITTERMENT – Diagnostic features compared with other conditions

	Embitterment	Depression	OCD	PTSD
Arises in the context of a relationship		4 []		-}
Expressions of injustice				-}
Ruminations		4		-}-
Mood disturbance	4		14	
Anger				{}
Modulation of key affective features		4		

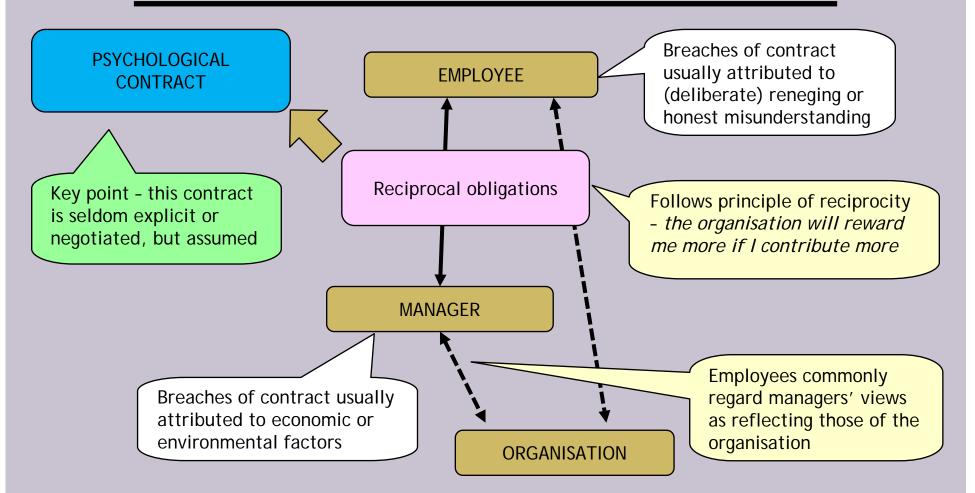
EMBITTERMENT AMONG NHS STAFF ATTENDING OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH

Study hypotheses:

Chronic embitterment is

- widely prevalent
- associated with
 - depression and anxiety
 - higher levels of sickness absence
 - perceived breaches of the psychological work contract
 - perceived breaches of organisational justice

PSYCHOLOGICAL WORK CONTRACT



Lester SW et al: J Organizational Behavior (2002)

ORGANISATIONAL JUSTICE

ORGANISATIONAL JUSTICE

DISTRIBUTIVE JUSTICE

• Fairness of outcomes

PROCEDURAL JUSTICE

- Procedures applied consistently
- Free of bias
- Accurate information collected and used in decision-making
- Mechanism to correct flawed decisions
- Account taken of views of those affected by the decisions
- Process conforms to prevailing ethical/moral standards

INFORMATIONAL JUSTICE

 Explanations of procedures and actions

INTERPERSONAL JUSTICE Politeness Dignity

Respect

Colquitt JA et al: J Applied Psychology (2001)

METHODS

- Study carried out by Rose Salimu (OH advisor), Janet Ballard (OH physician) and Tom Sensky (OH psychiatrist)
- Sample: consecutive attenders at the Occupational Health Department at West London Mental Health NHS Trust
- Questionnaires completed after appointment with occupational health advisors or occupational health physician
- Exclusions staff considered too distressed to complete questionnaires

MEASURES

INSTRUMENT	ITEMS	REFERENCE
Embitterment Questionnaire	19	Linden <i>et al</i> (2007)
Hospital Anxiety & Depression Questionnaire	14	Zigmond & Snaith (1983)
Felt Obligation	7	Eisenberger <i>et al</i> (2001)
Organisational Support	6	Eisenberger <i>et al</i> (2001)
Psychological Contract	8	Eisenberger <i>et al</i> (2001)
Procedural Justice	6	Leventhal et al (1980)
HSE Stress Indicator Tool	35	HSE (2007)

SAMPLE

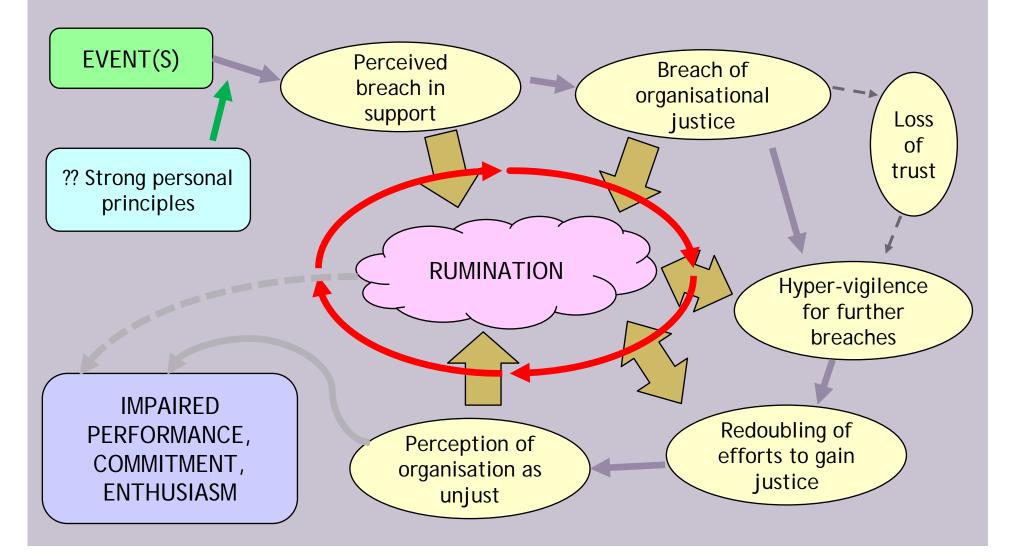
- Analysis based on 236 respondents
- 56% female
- 66% new attendance
- 68% with professional qualifications
 - 29% nurses
 - 21% health care assistants
 - 3% doctors
- 46% had been in their present job for 5 years or less

CONCLUSIONS FROM STUDY

Chronic embitterment

- is widely prevalent among NHS staff referred to Occupational Health
- occurs in the absence of depression or anxiety
- is associated with perceived failure of personal and/or organisational support
- is not associated with perceived breaches of the psychological work contract
- is more prevalent among those who have supervisory responsibilities

CHRONIC EMBITTERMENT



INDIVIDUAL MANAGEMENT

TASKS	APPROACHES
Work to get the person to:	Cognitive-behaviour therapy
Acknowledge the problem	 Mindfulness-based CBT
(including behaviours)	•?Mentoring
Reduce unhelpful behaviours	•?Problem-solving interventions
 Develop strategies to reduce rumination 	•??Dignity therapy (Linden)
Review <u>personal</u> goals	
Reduce likelihood of escalation	

ORGANISATIONAL MANAGEMENT

TASKS	APPROACHES
 Increase awareness of the condition (including causes and consequences) Reduce collusion with rumination (balancing need not to be perceived as dismissive) Encourage open and responsive communications Prompt response to investigations/grievances Attention to procedural justice 	 Training (at all levels of the organisation) Support for managers ?Mentoring for managers Mediation ?Train and provide access to "buddies" to those going through investigations

CONTACT DETAILS

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