The Critical Role of Supervisors in Shaping Employee Safety, Health, and Well-being

Jacquelyn Brady, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor of Psychology

San Jose State University

Overview

- Overview of employee safety, health, and well-being

- Making the case for focusing on supervisors

- An applied field intervention example: SERVe

- Concluding remarks

Overview of Employee Safety, Health, and Well-being

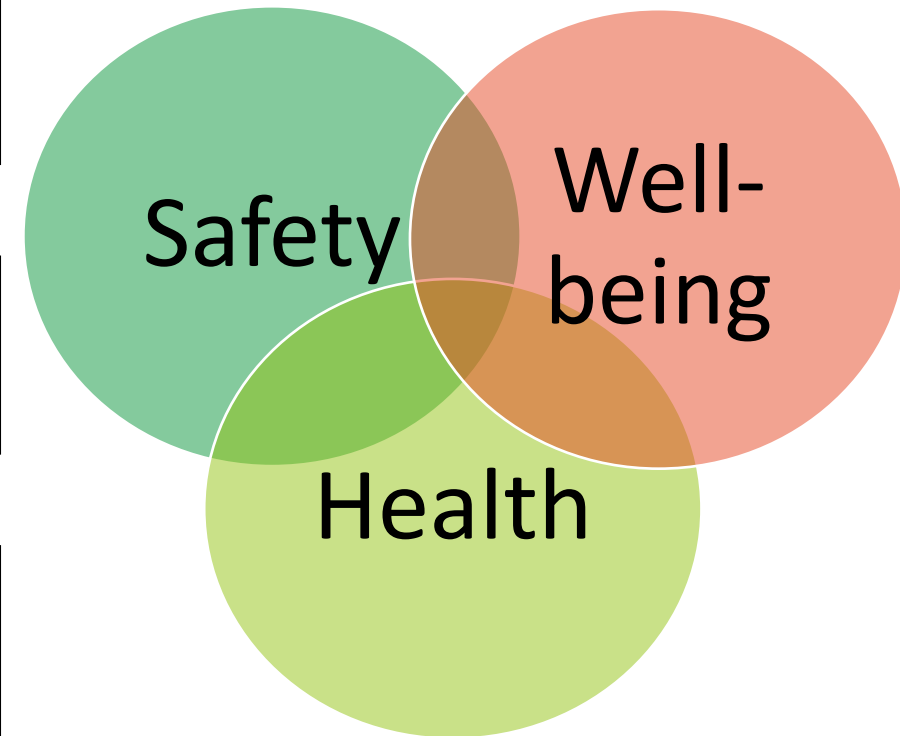# What is Safety, Health, and Well-being?

Safety

- Hazards, accidents, death, near misses

Health

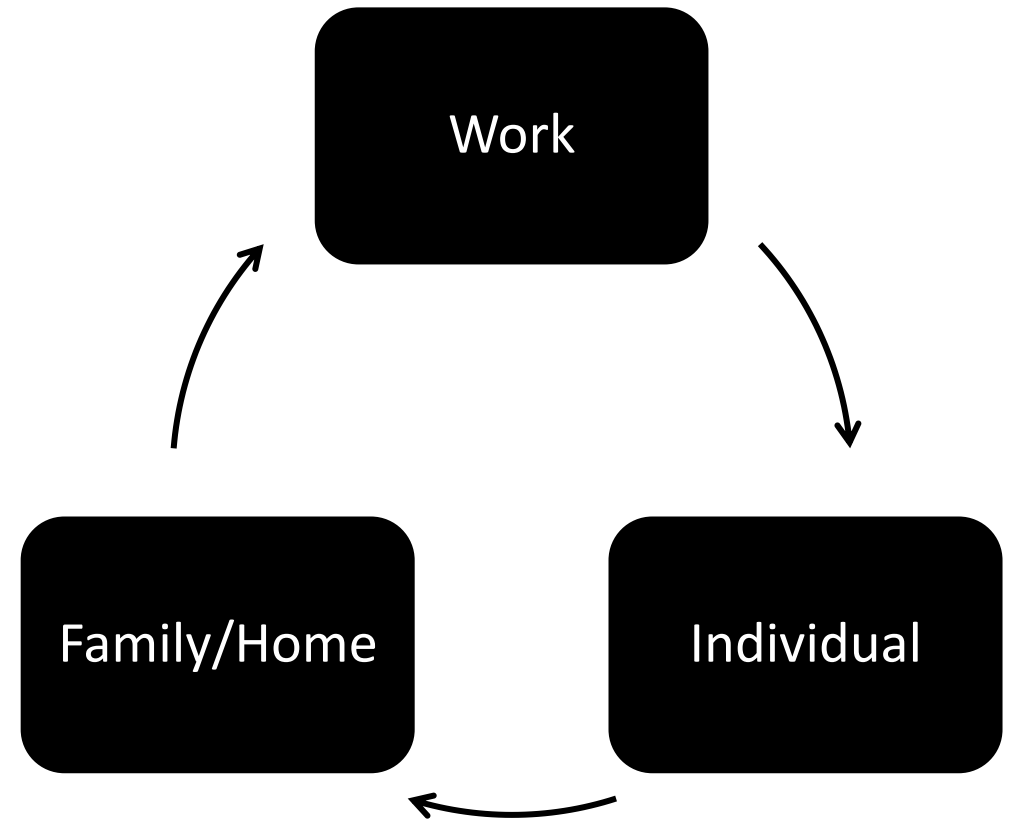- Physical symptoms, illness, disease

Well-being

- Psychological wellness, happiness, engagement

Safety

Well-being

Health

"What's work got to do with it?"

- A whole lot

- The only activity we do more is sleep[1]
- Each life domain is interconnected

```
        ┌──────────┐
        │   Work   │
        └──────────┘
       ↗              ↘
┌──────────────┐   ┌──────────────┐
│ Family/Home  │ ← │  Individual  │
└──────────────┘   └──────────────┘
```

Pervasive and Costly

Prevalence

Work is a leading source of stress[2]
2.8 million non-fatal illness and injuries reported[3]
More than 14 accident related deaths every day[4]

Cost

For businesses, individuals, and families
$1 Billion per week in workers compensation[5]
103,000,000 days lost[6]

Actionable Solutions through the field of Occupational Health Psychology (OHP)

The application of psychology to improve the quality of work life, and to protect and promote the safety, health and well-being of workers[7]

OHP Interventions

Individual Interventions

Do not solve underlying issue

Can be resource intensive

Organizational Interventions

Can address broader problem

Change aspects of the culture to promote safety health and well-being

Making the Case for Focusing on Supervisors

Why Supervisors?

1. Social relationships are critical

2. Supervisors are uniquely positioned to change the work context

Social Relationships

- Social relationships are one of the strongest predictors of disease and mortality[8]

  - Direct and indirect effects on behaviors, health, and well-being[9]

- Importance of employee-supervisor social relationship

  - Subject of many organizational theories

  - Robust empirical evidence

Supervisors' Unique Position

Resource facilitation

- Support
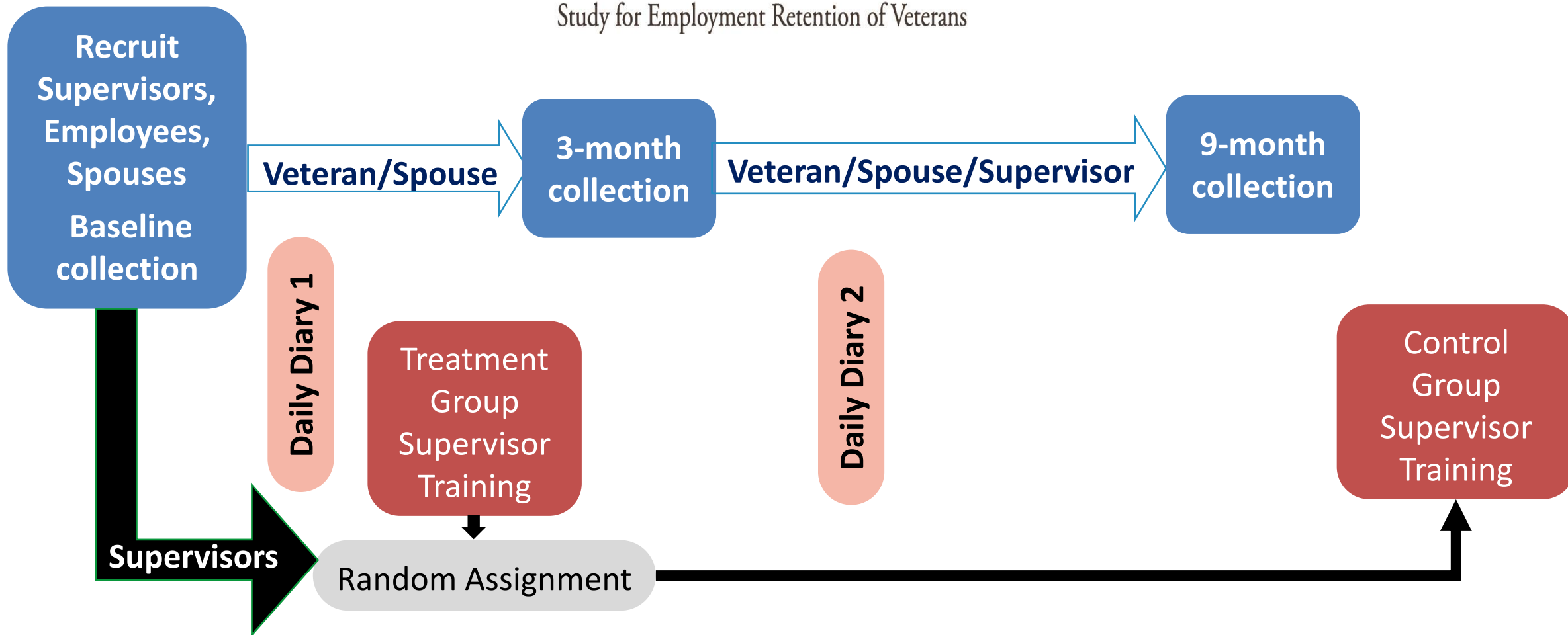- Instrumental Resources
- Job Design

↔

Influence Culture

- What is rewarded
- Leader behaviors and Role modeling

Evidence for Leveraging Supervisors

- Critical point of intervention for employee occupational safety and health[10]

- Mental Health Awareness Training

  - Reduction in duration of short-term disability[11]

  - Improves resource utilization[12]

- Focusing on Leadership to improve safety is effective for reducing accidents, injuries[13, 14]

An Applied Field Intervention Example: SERVe

SERVe
Study for Employment Retention of Veterans

Recruit Supervisors, Employees, Spouses
Baseline collection

→ Veteran/Spouse → **3-month collection** → Veteran/Spouse/Supervisor → **9-month collection**

Daily Diary 1

Daily Diary 2

Treatment Group Supervisor Training

Supervisors → Random Assignment → Control Group Supervisor Training

P.I.: Dr. Leslie Hammer

14

Supervisor Training

Supportive Supervisor Training

1. Emotional Support → e.g., empathize, listen,
2. Instrumental Support → e.g., leveraging tools to support employees where possible (e.g., time off)
3. Role modeling → healthy work-life behaviors
4. Creative win-win management → creative solutions

Behavior tracking

- Log support behaviors online

Moderated discussion forums

- Ask questions to researchers, engage with other supervisors

Major Findings

- Supervisors attitudes towards target employees improve following supportive supervisor training[15]

- Real world applied interventions can change employees' lives (e.g., reduce stress, improve sleep)[15, 16]

- Preliminary evidence suggests
  - Relationship improvement for both employees and spouses[17]
  - Improvement in aggregated daily moods[18]

The MESH Study

- DOD funded Oregon Military Employee Sleep and Health (OR-MESH) Study (Army and Air National Guard)

- Multi-pronged intervention
  - Training leaders on general, sleep, and family specific support
  - Sleep Tracking (baseline, 9 months) and Sleep Feedback (following baseline)

- Surveys at baseline, 4 months and 9 months

P.I.: Dr. Leslie Hammer

Concluding Remarks

- Occupational Safety, Health, Well-being are and will remain serious concerns
- Leaders are critical resource facilitators who can change the culture
  - They can provide support, provide role-modeling, win-win management
- Organizations and policies must support leaders supporting!

Future Directions

- Consider the organization contexts
- Follow employees, provide booster modules

Study for Employment Retention of Veterans

This research was conducted as part of the Study for Employment Retention of Veterans (SERVe; https://www.servestudy.org/)

This research was conducted as part of the Military Employee Sleep and Health Study (MESH; https://www.meshstudy.org/).

Thank you!

Email: Jacquelyn.Brady@sjsu.edu

References

1. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2019). American Time Use Survey Summary by Employment Status. Retrieved from: https://www.bls.gov/charts/american-time-use/activity-by-work.htm

2. American Psychological Association (2019). Stress in America: Stress and Current Events. Stress in America™ Survey. Retrieved From: https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/stress/2019/stress-america-2019.pdf

3. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2019). The Economics Daily. Retrieved from: https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2019/2-point-8-million-nonfatal-workplace-injuries-and-illnesses-occurred-in-2018.htm#:~:text=2.8%20million%20nonfatal%20workplace%20injuries%20and%20illnesses%20occurred%20in%202018&text=There%20were%202.8%20million%20nonfatal,number%20was%20unchanged%20from%202017.&text=This%20was%20the%20first%20year,private%20industry%20has%20not%20decreased.

4. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2019). Economic News Release: Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries Summary, 2018. Retrieved from: https://www.bls.gov/news.release/cfoi.nr0.htm

5. U.S. Department of Labor. Oregon Safety and Heath Association. Business Case for Safety and Health: Costs. Retrieved from: https://www.osha.gov/dcsp/products/topics/businesscase/costs.html#:~:text=In%20addition%20to%20their%20social,include%20direct%20and%20indirect%20costs.

6. National Safety Council. (2019). Work Injury Costs. Retrieved from: https://injuryfacts.nsc.org/work/costs/work-injury-costs/

7. Center for Disease Control (2013). National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health. Occupational Health Psychology. Retrieved from: https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/ohp/default.html

8. Holt-Lunstad, J., Smith, T. B., & Layton, J. B. (2010). Social relationships and mortality risk: a meta-analytic review. *PLoS Medicine*, *7*(7), e1000316.

9. Umberson, D., & Karas Montez, J. (2010). Social relationships and health: A flashpoint for health policy. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, *51*(1_suppl), S54-S66.

References continued

10. Kelloway, E. K., & Barling, J. (2010). Leadership development as an intervention in occupational health psychology. *Work & Stress*, *24*(3), 260-279.

11. Dimoff, J. K., Kelloway, E. K., & Burnstein, M. D. (2016). Mental health awareness training (MHAT): The development and evaluation of an intervention for workplace leaders. *International Journal of Stress Management, 23*(2), 167–189. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0039479

12. Dimoff, J. K., & Kelloway, E. K. (2019). With a little help from my boss: The impact of workplace mental health training on leader behaviors and employee resource utilization. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, 24*(1), 4–19.

13. Nahrgang, J. D., Morgeson, F. P., & Hofmann, D. A. (2011). Safety at work: a meta-analytic investigation of the link between job demands, job resources, burnout, engagement, and safety outcomes. *Journal of applied psychology*, *96*(1), 71.

14. Clarke, S., Guediri, S., & Lee, A. (2017). Leadership and Safety. Leading to occupational health and safety: How leadership behaviours impact organizational safety and well-being, 9-32. In (Eds.) K.E. Kelloway, K. Nielsen, & J.K. Dimoff (2017). *Leading to occupational health and safety: How leadership behaviours impact organizational safety and well-being*. West Sussex, UK : Wiley/Blackwell.

15. Hammer, L. B., Brady, J. M., & Perry, M. L. (2020). Training supervisors to support veterans at work: Effects on supervisor attitudes and employee sleep and stress. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, *93*(2), 273-301.

16. Hammer, L. B., Wan, W. H., Brockwood, K. J., Bodner, T., & Mohr, C. D. (2019). Supervisor support training effects on veteran health and work outcomes in the civilian workplace. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *104*(1), 52.

17. Brady, J.M., Hammer, L.B., Mohr, C.D., & Bodner, T. (R&R) Supportive supervisor training improves marital relationship quality among employee and spouse dyads.

18. Mohr, C.D., Hammer, L.B., Brady, J.M., Perry, M.L., & Bodner, T. (R&R). Evidence of supervisor training effectiveness on day-to-day affect among employed veterans: Findings from the Daily Family Study (DFS).