
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)

Psychotherapy
and Psychosomatics

Special Article

Psychother Psychosom 2003;72:195–202

DOI: 10.1159/000070783

Posttraumatic Embitterment Disorder

Michael Linden

Research Group Psychosomatic Rehabilitation, Free University of Berlin and Department of Behavioral and Psychosomatic Medicine, BfA Rehabilitation Center Teltow/Berlin, Berlin, Germany

CHRONIC EMBITTERMENT: COMMON FEATURES

HISTORY	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Anger, focussed on the organisation or an individual within it• Strong sense of injustice or unfairness• Prominent ruminations• Affective modulation preserved• (Often also need to recount events in detail)

CHRONIC EMBITTERMENT: Possible contributory factors

PERSONAL	SITUATIONAL/ ORGANISATIONAL
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Strong personal aspirations (especially strong principles and sense of justice)• Perceived breach of the psychological work contract• ?Particular personality traits	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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	+	+ -		+ -
Expressions of injustice	+			+ -
Ruminations	+	+ -	+	+ -
Mood disturbance	+ -	+	+ -	+
Anger	+			+ -
Modulation of key affective features	+	+ -	+ -	+

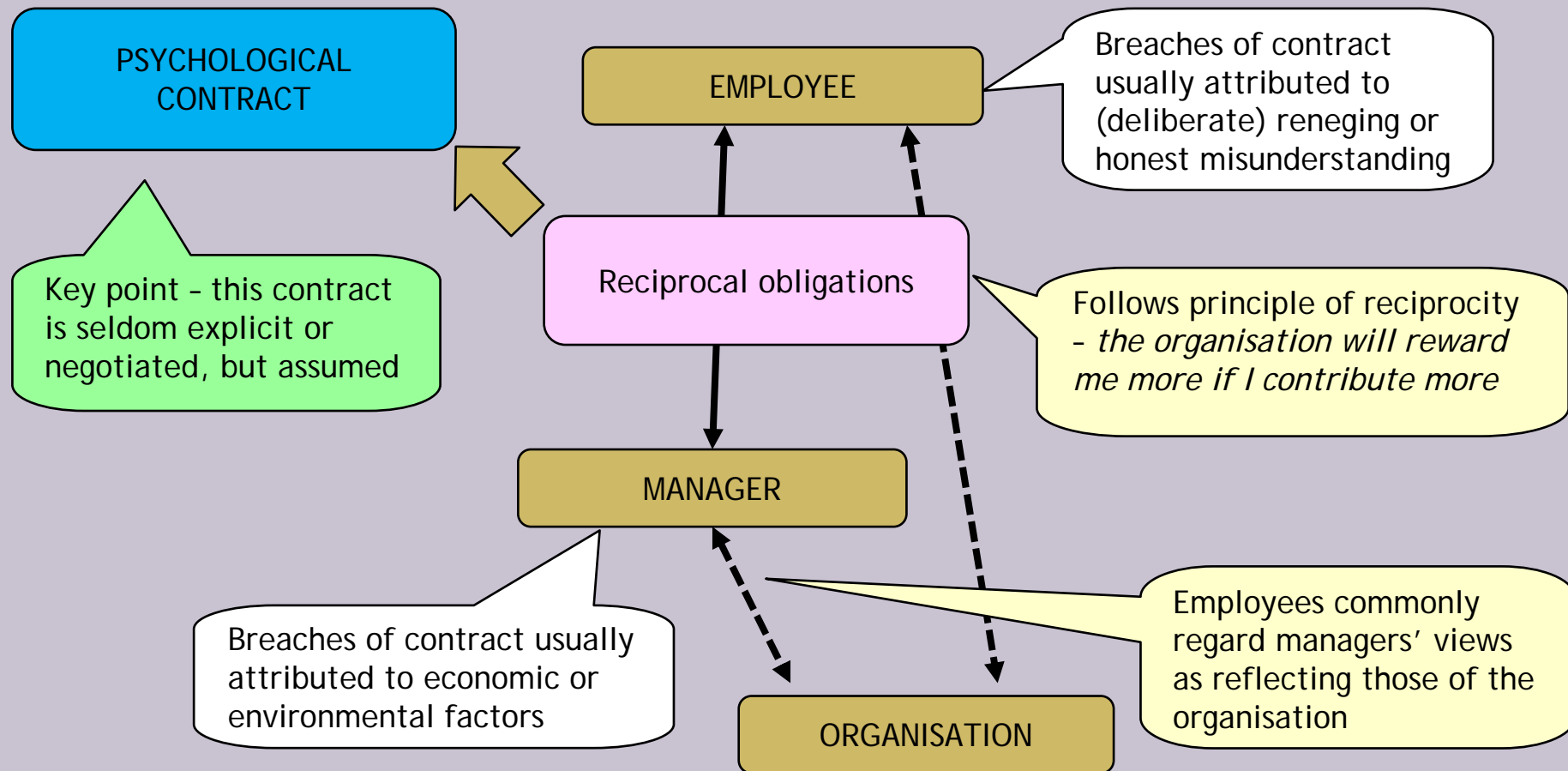
EMBITTERMENT AMONG NHS STAFF ATTENDING OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH

Study hypotheses:

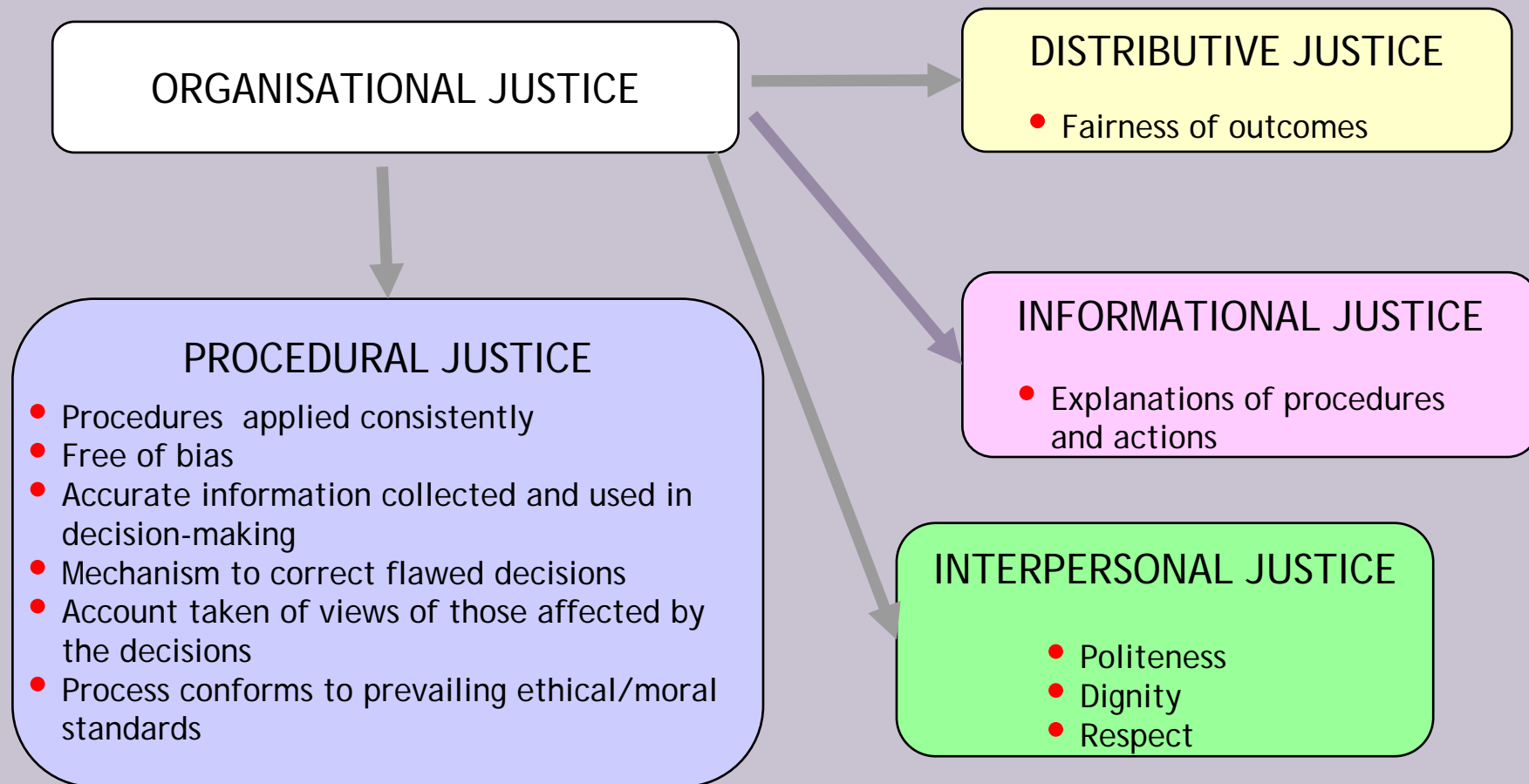
Chronic embitterment is

- 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



ORGANISATIONAL JUSTICE



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 <i>et al</i> (1980)
HSE Stress Indicator Tool	35	HSE (2007)

SAMPLE

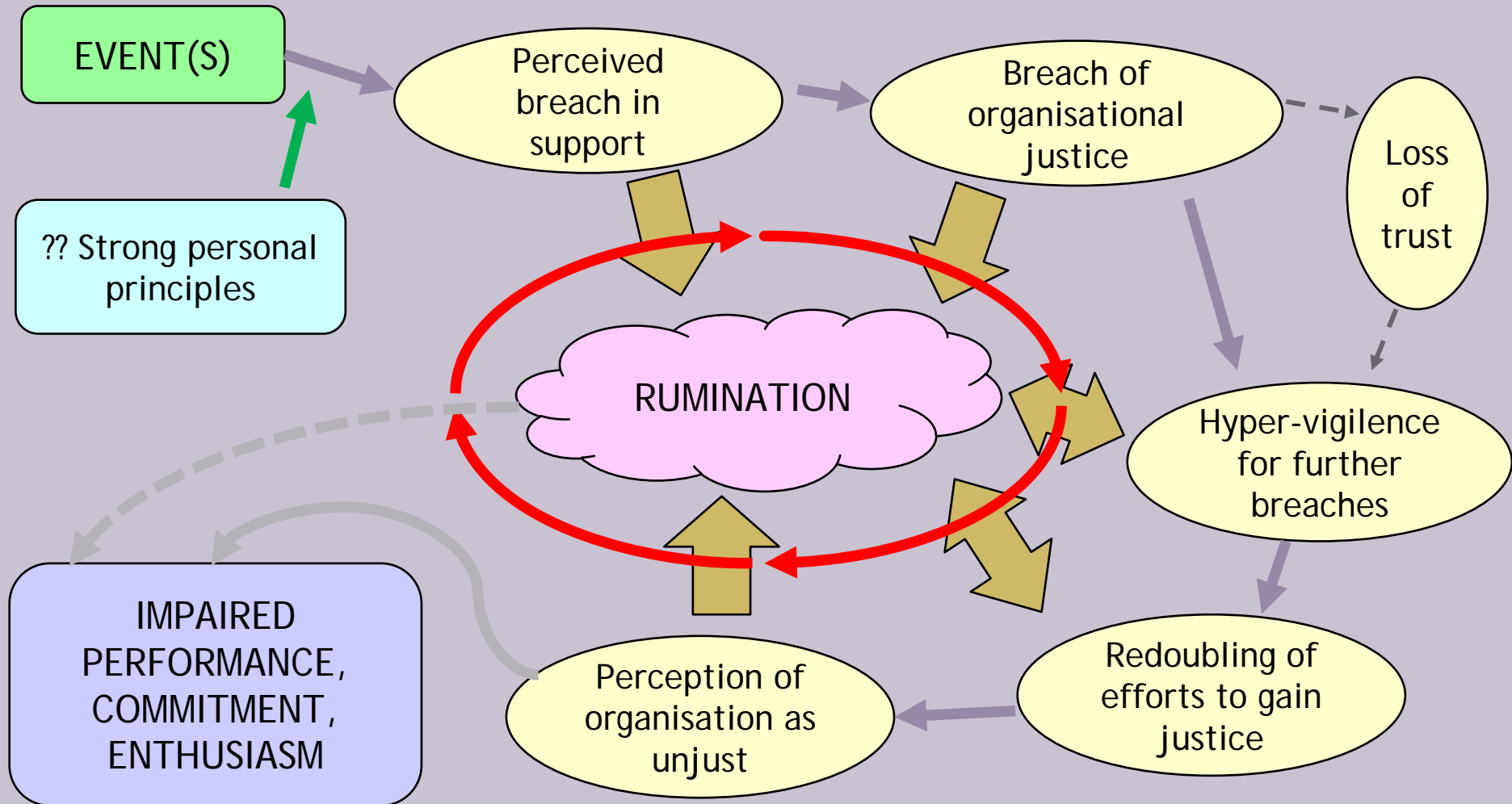
- Analysis based on 236 respondents
- 56% female
- 66% new attendance
- 68% with professional qualifications
 - 29% nurses
 - 21% health care assistants
 - 3% doctors
- 46% had been in their present job for 5 years or less

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
<p>Work to get the person to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Acknowledge the problem (including behaviours)• Reduce unhelpful behaviours• Develop strategies to reduce rumination• Review <u>personal</u> goals• Reduce likelihood of escalation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cognitive-behaviour therapy• Mindfulness-based CBT• ?Mentoring• ?Problem-solving interventions• ??Dignity therapy (Linden)

ORGANISATIONAL MANAGEMENT

TASKS	APPROACHES
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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

Janet Ballard

janet.ballard@nhs.net