Motivation and Well-Being in Humanitarian Health Workers:

Relating Self-Determination Theory to hedonic vs. eudaimonic well-being, vitality and burnout

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Abstract

This research examined the effects of motivation on the well-being of humanitarian health workers. Using Self-Determination Theory, I argued introjected and identified motivations were applicable to this occupational domain, and have differential effects on well-being. Introjected motivation would be positively related to hedonic well-being and burnout, while identified motivation would be positively related to eudaimonic well-being and vitality. Orientations to happiness and passion were proposed as mediating these relationships. An online quantitative questionnaire was used in the first phase of data collection. Respondents were $N = 82$ humanitarian health workers. A semi-structured interview methodology was used in the second phase. Participants were $N = 5$ humanitarian health workers. Path analyses revealed neither introjected nor identified motivation was significantly related to vitality or hedonic vs. eudaimonic well-being. Both motivations had significant direct effects on burnout, albeit in the opposite direction to hypotheses. Passion moderated the relationship between motivation and burnout. Additional path analyses showed obsessive passion mediated the path between introjected motivation and emotional exhaustion. Harmonious passion mediated the path between identified motivation and diminished personal accomplishment. Both obsessive and harmonious passion mediated the paths between each motivation and depersonalisation, although identified motivation had the strongest relationship with this aspect of burnout. Interview data supported the majority of quantitative findings. The results suggest the motivations underlying engagement in humanitarian work, are related to the development of burnout. The mediational effect of passion determines which aspect of burnout will be most prevalent. The findings have applicability to the design and implementation of recruitment strategies, and programs aimed at the treatment and prevention of burnout in workers, both pre- and post-deployment to humanitarian situations.
I dedicate this thesis to my nephews: Blake, Finn, Phoenix, and Jarvis. I hope they grow to be men of compassion and humanitarianism.

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