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Vitality and Burnout of Employees in Christian Humanitarian Organisations: The Role of Need Satisfaction at Work and Religious Beliefs

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Psychology At Massey University, Albany New Zealand

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2012
Abstract

Humanitarian workers are at relatively high risk of developing a range of negative outcomes in response to stress. For individual employees, the organisations they represent, and the people they serve, it is important to examine workplace wellbeing. This research analysed vitality and burnout as constructs of wellbeing in employees of international, Christian humanitarian organisations based in Chennai, India. This wellbeing dichotomy was explored through two main factors: basic psychological need satisfaction at work, and religious beliefs. These two factors were examined through a Self-Determination Theory framework.

Data was collected via a questionnaire comprised of psychometrically established measures and six open-ended questions for supplementary qualitative data. There were 99 respondents.

The results demonstrated the importance of supporting autonomy, competence and relatedness (basic psychological needs) in employees of humanitarian organisations. Workplace support leading to basic need satisfaction was associated with increased vitality and decreased levels of burnout. Autonomous motivations for religious beliefs were positively associated with vitality, and non-autonomous motivations for religious beliefs were linked with decreased burnout. The use of religious coping was not as clearly linked with these wellbeing constructs except that the presence of negative religious coping was positively related to burnout.

The findings are pertinent for humanitarian organisations, particularly those with a Christian foundation, to understand and facilitate factors that increase vitality and decrease burnout in the workplace.
Acknowledgements

The completion of this thesis is due to the support I have received from many people along the way.

Thank you to my husband, Peter, for his support and extreme patience with me throughout the long process of writing the thesis.

Thanks to my family who have been willing to help me to accomplish the practical aspects that I cannot do from overseas - thank you Monique.

To my supervisor, Dr Natasha Tassell, I really appreciate your time, guidance, patience and encouragement.

A special thanks to the organisations who allowed me to distribute my questionnaires among your staff – I could not have done this without your support.
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