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Vitality and Burnout of Employees in Christian Humanitarian Organisations:

The Role of Need Satisfaction at Work and Religious Beliefs

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Tamara Joanne Williams

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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.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	v
Acknowledgements	vii
List of Tables	xi
List of Figures	xiii
1.0 Introduction	1
2.0 Self-Determination Theory	6
2.1 Organismic-Dialectical Meta-Theory	6
2.2 Basic Needs Theory	6
2.3 Motivation	8
2.4 Cross-Cultural Considerations	11
3.0 Need Satisfaction at Work	12
3.1 Basic need satisfaction in the workplace	12
3.2 Person-environment fit and need satisfaction	16
3.3 Humanitarian work and need satisfaction	17
4.0 Christian Religious Beliefs	19
4.1 Justification for Studying Christian Religious Beliefs	19
4.2 Faith and Wellbeing	19
4.3 Internalisation of Faith	20
4.4 Religious Coping	21
4.5 The Present Research	25
5.0 Wellbeing Outcomes: Subjective Vitality and Burnout	26
5.1 Subjective Vitality	27
5.2 Burnout	28
5.3 The Relevance of Stress to Wellbeing	30
5.4 The Present Research	31
6.0 Hypotheses	33
6.1 Environmental Factor: Basic Need Satisfaction at Work	33
6.2 Individual Factors: Religious Beliefs	34
6.3 Relative Contributions of Basic Need Satisfaction and Religious Beliefs	36
7.0 Methods and Materials	37

7.1	Research Approach.....	37
7.2	Sample	37
7.3	Procedure	38
7.4	Measures	39
7.5	Qualitative Data	42
8.0	Results	45
8.1	Quantitative Analysis	45
8.2	Relationships Between Demographic and Psychological Variables	48
8.3	Primary Analyses: Relationships among Psychological Variables	51
8.4	Qualitative Analysis	60
9.0	Discussion	73
9.1	Research Findings	73
9.2	Practical Implications	95
9.3	Limitations of the Present Study and Suggestions for Future Research.....	98
9.4	Conclusion	102
	References	103
	Appendix A – Research Information Sheet for Organisations	128
	Appendix B – Informed Consent Form for Organisations	130
	Appendix C – Research Information Sheet for Participants.....	131
	Appendix D – Research Questionnaire.....	133
	Appendix E – Open-ended questions to elicit qualitative data.....	144
	Appendix F – Exploratory Data Analysis	145
	Appendix G – Descriptive Statistics for all individual items on each subscale	148
	Appendix F – Descriptive Statistics for Comparison Samples.....	153

List of Tables

Table 1:	Demographic Information on Sample.....	45
Table 2:	Score ranges, Means, Standard Deviations, and Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficients for all research variables.....	46
Table 3:	Score ranges, Means, Standard Deviations, and Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficients for all research variables.....	50
Table 4:	Pearson's correlations (r) between vitality and burnout.....	51
Table 5:	Pearson's correlations (r) between basic need satisfaction at work and wellbeing.....	52
Table 6:	Pearson's correlations (r) between internalisation of religious beliefs and wellbeing.....	53
Table 7:	Pearson's correlations (r) that vitality, burnout and internalisation of religious beliefs have with GCOS.....	54
Table 8:	Identification and introjection beta coefficients in a comparison of vitality and burnout multiple regression models with and without GCOS.....	54
Table 9:	Pearson's correlations (r) between religious coping and wellbeing.....	55
Table 10:	Pearson's correlations (r) between religious coping and internalisation of religious beliefs.....	56
Table 11:	Moderation analysis of interaction between internalised religious beliefs and religious coping.....	57
Table 12:	Standard multiple regression models for vitality and burnout showing standardised regression coefficients, R, R ² and Adjusted R ² for all participants.....	59
Table 13:	The z values indicating normality of data transformations with and without outliers.....	145
Table 14:	Sample sizes, Means and Standard Deviations of all relevant individual Items.....	148
Table 15:	Sample sizes, Means and Standard Deviations of Comparison Samples for Vitality (One study from Tassell's (2009) Appendix I on Comparison Samples).....	153
Table 16:	Sample sizes, Means and Standard Deviations of Comparison Samples for Burnout (Two studies from Tassell's (2009) Appendix I on Comparison Samples).....	154

Table 17:	Sample sizes, Means and Standard Deviations of Comparison Samples for Basic Need Satisfaction at Work.....	154
Table 18:	Sample sizes, Means and Standard Deviations of Comparison Samples for Christian Religious Internalisation Scale.....	155
Table 19:	Sample sizes, Means and Standard Deviations of Comparison Samples for Religious Coping.....	156
Table 20:	Sample sizes, Means and Standard Deviations of Comparison Samples for General Causality Orientations.....	157

List of Figures

Figure 1:	Schematic representation of hypothesised relationships between basic need satisfaction at work, vitality and burnout.....	4, 34
Figure 2:	Schematic representation of hypothesised relationships between internalisation of Christian religious beliefs, religious coping, vitality and burnout.....	5, 36
Figure 3:	The self-determination continuum, showing the motivational, self-regulatory, and perceived locus of causality bases of behaviours that vary in the degree to which they are self-determined. Reprinted from “The what and why of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behavior.” by Deci & Ryan, 2000, <i>Psychological Inquiry</i> , 11, 237.....	10
Figure 4:	The transactional model of stress and coping. Reprinted from “Stress, Appraisal and Coping” by Lazarus & Folkman, 1984.....	23
Figure 5:	Relative frequency of main themes in coping with stress.....	69