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**Psychosocial Factors Relating to  
Adaptive Capacity in a New Zealand  
District Health Board**

A thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of the current research was to examine how factors identified in the Organisational Health Framework (Hart & Cooper, 2001) may relate to stress and well-being in a sample of the New Zealand health workforce. It was anticipated that the findings would provide information as to what adaptive strategies may be utilised in the health sector in both routine and emergency management contexts.

The research focusses on the individual and situational factors identified as having the potential to contribute to positive outcomes. Salutogenesis (Antonovsky, 1979) is used as an overarching paradigm for the context of the research to understand mechanisms which promote adaptive capacity between individuals, teams and their organisation in relation to predictors of stress and growth in a large New Zealand District Health Board (DHB). Two New Zealand national emergency response exercises took place shortly before data collection for the studies. The exercises provided examples of realistic contexts within which to assess the individual and situational factors associated with positive outcomes and adaptive capacity given that the health sector will have a large part to play in the response and recovery to such emergency events.

The methodology applied self-report surveys. The first study comprised 155 participants across clinical, medical and nursing professions and management and administration roles. Study 2 comprised 199 participants from the same role categories as Study 1. In both studies, stress and growth were related to both individual and situational factors but individual factors such as personality and coping strategies appeared to play a more significant role than situational factors. The emotion-focused

coping strategies adopted by these groups were positive rather than maladaptive. Results show that emotion–focussed coping strategies may contribute to adaptive capacity by successfully neutralising stressors in the sample. Implications of these findings are discussed.

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To these special people I dedicate this research.

In memory of my grandparents, Herbert and Alice Jackson.

I travel the world in all its many facets and you share the journey with me.

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