Relationships between Personality and Burn-Out: An Empirical Study with Helping Professions' Workers

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Abstract: Stress-related illnesses, such as burnout, had an increase over the last decade, even though not every employee, in the same workplace, shows burnout symptoms, suggesting that individual factors may contribute to this phenomenon. In fact, even though research on burnout generally has tended to explore the organizational factors associated with this condition, which play certainly an important role, however we cannot ignore the relationship between burnout and personality. This study explored the relationship between personality and burn-out in 144 helping professions' workers. Personality was measured by the Big Five Questionnaire; burn-out was measured by the Link Burn-out Questionnaire. Results confirm a relationship between the two constructs, partially supporting previous research that explained burn-out not only by organizational factors, but also by individual dimensions.

INTRODUCTION

The literature on the psychological cost of the cure is mostly consistent (see Maslach, Leiter and Jackson 2012). After about 35 years of studies on burnout, the studies focused their attention on two opposite domains (Schaufeli, Leiter and Maslach 2009): there are researchers who focused their attention on environment correlates that cause an exhaustion of an individual's energies or emotional resources (Pines, 1993; Hobfoll, 1989; Cordes and Dougherty 1993; Halbesleben and Buckley, 2004); other researchers, on the contrary, focused their studies on the intrinsic characteristics of workers (Piedmont, 1993; Schaufeli and Enzmann, 1998; Gustafsson, Persson, Eriksson, Norberg, and Strandberg, 2009; Alarcon, Eschleman and Bowling, 2009; Kizilci, Erdogan and Sozen, 2012).

As Alarcon, Eschelman and Bowling (2009) underlined, burnout is a negative emotional reaction to one's job that results from prolonged exposure to a stressful work environment (Maslach and Jackson, 1984); (Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter, 2001). Burnout can be considered an indicator of low levels of employee well-being, and it is also related to employee attitudes, health, and behavior (Cordes and Dougherty, 1993; (Lee and Ashforth, 1996; (Maslach, 2003; Maslach and Goldberg, 1998; Maslach *et al.*, 2001). Although most burnout research has focused on environmental correlates, individual factors also play an important role in the development of burnout (Maslach *et al.*, 2001). According to Bakker, Van der Zee, Lewing

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and Dollard (2006) burnout is usually defined as a psychological syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach, 1993). Emotional exhaustion refers to the depletion of psychic energy or the draining of emotional resources. Depersonalization refers to the development of negative, cynical attitudes toward the recipients of one's services. Lack of personal accomplishment is the tendency to evaluate one's own work with recipients negatively, an evaluation that is often accompanied by feelings of inefficacy (Maslach, 1993). Although more recent research has shown that burnout can be found both within and outside the human services (e.g., Bakker, Demerouti and Schaufeli, 2002), human service professionals, helping professionals' overall, are generally at relatively high risk for burnout (Schaufeli, 2003); in fact, they have very often to cope with emotionally demanding relationships with the individuals of their care. Such relationships have the aim to help others to cope with or to solve their social or health or psychological, or educational problems; often helping professionals have to deal with troubled people who suffer and are in need.

In the a recent revision of the burnout model, proposed by Santinello, Altoè, and Verzelletti (2006), a new dimension has been included, the disillusion. So the four dimensions in this revision of the burnout construct are:

1. *psycho-physical exhaustion*, that refers to feel tense, under pressure, without energy;

2. *detriment of relationships*, that describes the quality of relationship between employees and

their clients; this relationship is characterized by insensility, and distance form clients' problems;

3. *professional inefficacy*, that includes the lack of gratifications by own work;

4. *disillusion*, in fact burnout is considered as the arrival of a long disillusion process, in which the expectations towards the work have been totally disregarded (Edelwich and Brodsky, 1980).

Recent studies (Kizilci *et al.*, 2012; Ghasemian, Tabatabaei and Ebrahimi, 2014) remembered that both individual and situational factors are predictor of burnout. Individual factors include demographic characteristics, personality characteristics and job attitudes. Situational factors include job characteristics, occupational characteristics and organizational characteristics (Maslach *et al.*, 2001).

BURNOUT AND PERSONALITY

A large number of scientific research indicate that burnout is related to personality characteristics. Some researcher (Jacobs and Dodd, 2003; Rostami, Abedi and Schaufeli 2012) have found that extraversion is related with emotional exhaustion and reduced sense of personal accomplishment (Morgan and de Bruin, 2010; Zellars, Perrewe and Hochwarter, 2000), on the contrary, found that extraversion is related with depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment.

The reasons why personality traits could be considered as moderators of burnout are: 1) in experiencing burnout, people respond to work settings in their own unique individual way (Maslach *et al.* 2001), so people may perceive specific aspects of a situation as more or less stressful and will react differently to situations, according to their personality characteristics (Watson, David and Suls, 1999; Vollrath, 2001; Suls and Martin, 2005); 2) personality plays a role in the stress experience, in the perception of threat and in the concomitant emotional and physiological reactions (Chung and Harding, 2009).

Other studies (Zellars *et al.* 2000, 2004), focusing on staff working with clients or patients without intellectual disabilities, highlighted that neuroticism is a positive predictor of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization; extraversion, agreeableness and openness negatively predicted depersonalization; and extraversion and openness positively predicted personal accomplishment. These results support the

hypothesis that personality traits predict burnout components in different ways.

More recently, Gustafsson *et al.* (2009), have investigated the role of personality traits in a group with burnout syndrome, compared with a control-group, and found that emotional stability, mental alertness, confidence and power, are the predictor/precursors of burnout; Alarcon *et al.* (2009), in a meta-analytic study, found that many personality characteristics were consistently related to the three dimensions of burnout. Specifically, self-esteem, general self-efficacy, internal locus of control, emotional stability, extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, positive affectivity, negatively affectivity, optimism, proactive personality, and hardiness were each related to emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment.

THE BIG FIVE MODEL

Much of the recent research on personality has been based on the Five Factors-Model, which organizes personality traits under five broad dimension: emotional stability, extraversion conscientiousness, agreeableness and openness (Costa and McCrae, 1992). Caprara, Barbaranelli, Borgogni and Perugini, (1993), and Caprara, Barbaranelli and Guido, (2001) identified a general structure composed of only five broad personality dimensions/traits, so-called "Big Five Factors". They are: 1) Energy/Extroversion, the preference for social interaction and for activity; 2) Agreeableness, the orientation toward compassion and caring about others, away from antagonism; 3) Conscientiousness, the preference for goal-oriented activity; 4) Emotional Stability, the ability to cope effectively with negative emotions; and 5) Openness, the tolerance for new ideas and new ways of doing things, experientially oriented. The five domain are composed by two subdomain each, giving a description of the personality by ten facets: energy (dynamism and dominance facets), friendliness (cooperativeness and politeness facets), conscientiousness (scrupulousness and perseverance facets), emotional stability (emotion control and impulse control facets), and openness (openness to culture and openness to experiences facets) (Caprara, Barbaranelli and Bermudez, 2000).

ENERGY OR EXTROVERSION

Energy is referred to Extroversion (McCrae and Costa, 1987) or Surgency (Goldberg, 1990), the ability to cope problems positively as well as a high frequency

to establish social relationship (Caprara and Cervone, 2000). This dimension includes two sub-dimension, dynamism and dominance. *Dynamism* is referred to the energetic and dynamic behavior; this factor is decisive, ultimately, for implementation of coping strategies. *Dominance* refers to the ability to impose oneself, to assert the influence on other.

A large amount of research has shown the negative relationship between energy and burnout (Gonzalez-Roma´, Schaufeli, Bakker and Lloret, 2006; see also Sonnenschein, Sorbi, van Doornen, Schaufeli and Maas, 2007); however the results about the direction of this relationship are not definitive: while the research conducted by Gustafsson *et al.* (2009) found that the energy or extraversion is a stable predictor of burnout, Francis, Louden and Rutledge (2004) and Zellars *et al.* (2000), found a negative association between extroversion and depersonalization; Eastburg, Williamson, Gorsuch and Ridley (1994), and Francis *et al.* (2004), have consistently found a positive association between extroversion and personal accomplishment.

On the basis of this consideration we expect, as follows:

> *Hypothesis 1: energy will negatively predict burn-out in all of its dimensions, e.g. psycho-physical exhaustion, detriment of relationships, professional ineffectiveness and disillusion.*

Agreeableness or Friendliness

It is characterized by good-naturalness, cooperativeness, and trust. While this factor is more commonly called agreeableness, it can also be seen as a combination of friendliness and compliance. Persons who show high scores on this dimension tend to describe themselves as very cooperative, friendly, altruist, generous and empathic. This dimension is defined by two sub-dimension, respectively, *cooperativeness* and *politeness*: the first is related to the ability to cooperate effectively with other, the second measures aspects of affability, trust and openness towards others. Piedmont (1993) showed that agreeableness is negatively related with emotional exhaustion and positively with personal accomplishment. Zellars *et al.* (2000) highlighted that higher levels of agreeableness appear to reduce the tendency to depersonalization. Bakker *et al.* (2006) found a negative relationship between agreeableness

and emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, positive relationship with the personal accomplishment. More recently, confirming Bakker *et al.*'s study, Alarcon *et al.* (2009), found a negative relationship between agreeableness and emotional exhaustion. On the basis of this consideration we expect, as follows:

> *Hypothesis 2: agreeableness will negatively predict burn-out in all of its dimensions, e.g. psycho-physical exhaustion, detriment of relationships, professional ineffectiveness and disillusion.*

Conscientiousness

It is characterized by orderliness, responsibility, and reliability; this factor is sometimes associated with problem solving and efficacy in coping (Watson and Hubbard, 1996). People who get high score in this dimension tend to describe themselves as very thoughtful, meticulous, tide, accurate and very persevering. This dimension is composed by two sub-dimension, respectively, *scrupulousness* and *perseverance*: the first concerns the caution, reflexivity, orderliness, and attention to details, while the second concerns aspect that relate to the persistence and tenacity in achieving the goals and completing undertaken activities. The literature about the influence of this dimension in burn-out is not definitive: as reported by Bakker *et al.* (2006), Piedmont (1993), Deary, Blenkin, Agius, Endler, Zealley and Wood (1996), and Deary, Watson and Hogston (2003), there is a positive relationship between conscientiousness and personal accomplishment. Deary *et al.* (2003), in a longitudinal analysis of burnout in nursing students, indicated a positive relationship between conscientiousness and depersonalization. Then, LePine, LePine and Jackson (2004) found a negative association between conscientiousness and emotional exhaustion. We expect, as follows:

> *Hypothesis 3: consciousness will negatively predict burn-out in all of its dimensions, e.g. psycho-physical exhaustion, detriment of relationships, professional ineffectiveness and disillusion.*

Emotional Stability

It is referred to the ability to cope effectively with negative emotions. People that are emotionally stable

are able to tolerate the day to day strains and stresses, are able to manage effectively their emotions, without anxiety or anger. Emotional instability is considered close to neuroticism and is described as a tendency to experience negative, distressing emotions and to possess associated behavioral and cognitive traits; the traits that characterize this dimension are fearfulness, irritability, low self-esteem, social anxiety, poor inhibition of impulses, and helplessness (Costa and McCrae, 1987).

This dimension is characterized by two cluster of traits: *emotion control* and *impulse control.* Emotion control includes the control of the states of tension related to emotional experience; impulse control is related to the ability to keep control of the own behavior, even in difficulty situation, conflict and danger.

As reported by Bakker *et al*. (2006), many studies (e.g., Deary *et al*., 1996; Hills and Norvell, 1991; LePine *et al*., 2004; Lingard, 2003; Zellars *et al*., 2000) on the relationship between emotional instability and burnout have typically shown that individuals who are high in emotional instability are more likely to report feelings of emotional exhaustion, to report lower levels of personal achievement, and – if health care providers – to dehumanize their patients (depersonalization). In a study of intensive-care nursing staff, Buhler and Land (2003) found that individuals who were higher in neuroticism experienced higher levels of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization.

In our study, we expect, as follows:

Hypothesis 4: emotional stability will negatively predict burn-out in all of its dimensions, e.g. psycho-physical exhaus-

tion, detriment of relationships, profess-sional ineffectiveness and disillusion.

Openness

It refers to originality, curiosity, and ingenuity; this factor is sometimes referred to intellectualism and independence of mind. This dimension is defined by two sub-dimension: openness to culture and openness to experience. The first tends to include the interest to be informed, and to acquire knowledge. The second is referred to the favorable disposition toward innovation, to the ability to consider everything from multiple perspectives, openness to different ways of life and different cultures. In addition, openness to experience has been related to the use of humor as a way of dealing with stress (McCrae and Costa, 1987). Smith and Williams (1992) posited that this factor may be associated with stress reduction because situations are appraised as less threatening by individuals who score high on this factor.

Bakker *et al*. (2006) found that the relationship between openness and burnout is generally weak, such as Deary *et al*. (1996), which found a modest but significant positive relationship between openness and personal accomplishment. Zellars *et al*. (2000) also reported a positive relationship between openness and personal accomplishment and, in addition, found a negative relationship between openness and depersonalization. Other research (Morgan and de Bruin, 2010) found a positive relationship between openness and professional efficacy.

So, we expect, as follows, that:

Hypothesis 5: openness will negatively predict burn-out in all of its dimensions,
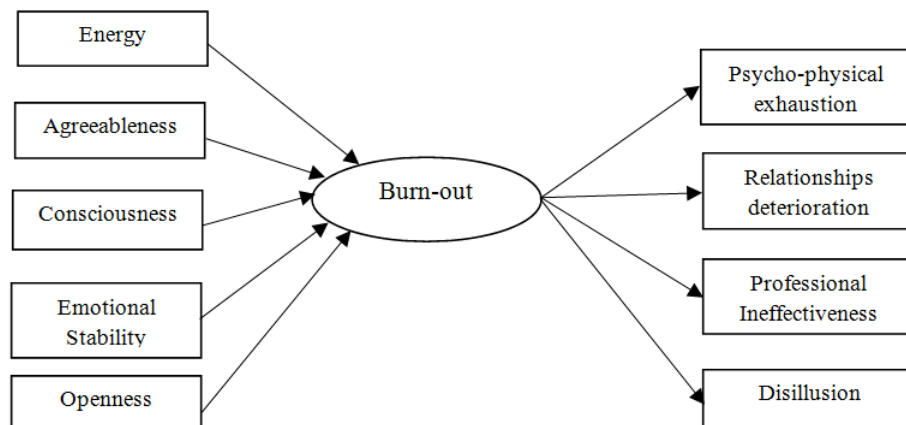

Figure 1:

e.g. psycho-physical exhaustion, detriment of relationships, professional ineffectiveness and disillusion.

The theoretical model is presented in Figure **1**.

MATHERIALS AND METHOD

Design and Procedure

The participation to this cross-sectional study was completely voluntary. The participants have been recruited on a voluntary basis; tests have been administrated individually, anonymously, and without time limits. The survey was reviewed and approved by the Ethics Commission of Kore University and the University of Verona. The research protocol included the two surveys presented in the following paragraph; the order of the surveys was counterbalanced.

Measures

The Big Five Questionnaire 2 (BFQ-2) (Caprara, Barbaranelli, Borgogni and Vecchione, 2007) is a 134 items self-response scale which reveals 5 big factors that describe personality; each factor is divided into two sub-domains:

1. *E: Energy* refers to the factor usually labeled as Extraversion or Surgency, is composed by Dynamism (Dy; sample item: *I feel active and vigorous*) and Dominance (Do; sample item: *Usually I tend to impose myself rather than acquiesce*). Cronbach's α =0.85.

2. *A: Agreeableness* refers to the factor usually labeled as Friendly Compliance vs. Hostility. The sub-dimensions are Cooperation (Cp; sample item: *I always know how to meet other people's needs*) - Friendliness (Fr; sample item: *People should show always polite with everyone*) Cronbach's α =0.87.

3. *C: Conscientiousness* refers to self-regulation in both its proactive and inhibitory aspects. It includes Scrupulosity (Sc; sample item: *I usually take care of everything in the smallest detail*) - Perseverance (Pe; sample item: *I carry out the decisions I have taken*). Cronbach's α =0.85.

4. *S: Emotional Stability* refers to characteristics of personality defined as the capacity to cope adequately with one's own anxiety and emotionality and the capability of controlling

irritation, discontent and anger. The sub-domains are Emotion control (Ec; sample item: *I do not feel an anxious person*) and Impulse control (Ic; sample item: *I do not usually react in an impulsive way*). Cronbach's α =0.90

5. *O: Openness* refers to the factor labeled as Culture or Intellect or Openness to Experience. It includes Openness to culture (Oc; sample item: *Reading is one of my favorite activities*) and Openness to experience (Oe; sample item: *Every new thing fascinates me*). Cronbach's α =0.88.

Each facet scale contains 12 items, half of which are positively phrased with respect to the scale name and half negatively phrased, to control for a possible acquiescent response set. In addition, there is a lie (L) scale designed to measure a social desirability response set and the tendency to distort meanings of the scores. The L scale contains 14 items that are all positively phrased. For each of the 134 items in the questionnaire, there is a 5-point answer scale that ranges from complete disagreement (1=very false for me) to complete agreement (5= very true for me).

The Link Burnout Questionnaire (LBQ) (Santinello, Altoè and Verzelletti, 2006) is composed by 24 item grouped in four dimensions (8 items for each dimension, 4 positive and 4 negative), as described above in the article:

-   *Psycho-physical exhaustion, sample item: I feel physically exhausted from my work.* Cronbach's α=0.81

-   *Detriment of the relationships, sample item: My patients seem thankless.* Cronbach's α=0.77

-   *Professional Inefficacy, sample item: I feel inadequate to face the problems of my patients.* Cronbach's α=0.83

-   *Disillusion*, sample item: *I doubt that what I do has any value.* Cronbach's α=0.86

Participants

Participants were 144 Italian helping-profession workers (32 males, 112 females), aged between 20 and 63 years (M=39.56; SD=9.61). They were educators in communities for disadvantaged children and adolescents, working in Italian context. The prevalence of women workers over men workers can

be derived from the limited diversity characterizing the company sector from which the participants come: specifically they represent highly feminized professions (63.4% of individuals employed in the health and family services are women; Italian National Institute of Statistics, [ISTAT], 2013).

Data Analysis

The actual survey data were analysed with structural equation modelling (SEM). Tests were completed in AMOS 22.0 (Arbuckle and Wothke, 1999) applying the maximum-likelihood (ML) method. Firstly a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to test the factor structure of the measures (Byrne, 2001). According to Harris and Schaubroeck (1990), CFA is most appropriate to use with established measures. Following Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson and Tatham (2006), multiple fit indices were used to assess the model's goodness-of-fit. The comparative fit index (CFI), the Goodness of Fit Index (GFI), the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) and the root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA) were used to test the model fit of the measurement model. After the measurement model was verified, this study performed the analysis of structural model to confirm the hypothesized relationships.

Other well-known analytical tools such as correlations were also used, which were implemented by using SPSS 21.0.

RESULTS

Descriptives and Correlations

Table **1** provides an overview of the means, standard deviations and correlations between the variables.

CFA of the Measures

The fit statistics revealed that the tested model fits the data adequately: $\chi^2(64) = 121.360$; $p < .001$; GFI = .90; CFI = .89; SRMR = .06; RMSEA= .079, indicating a good model fit. All variables were measured from the same source (helping professions' workers), and therefore common method bias (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee and Podsakoff, 2003) may occur.

To address potential CMV, Harman's single-factor test was adopted. A comparison between the hypothesized model (the five personality traits and burn-out as separate factors) and a one-factor model (with all items loading on a single factor) revealed that the hypothesized model provided better fit for the data ($\Delta\chi^2$ (14) = 362.821). According to these results, no evidence for common method bias was found in the data.

Structural Model

After the above CFA model was verified, the analysis of structural model was performed. The results reveal that only some of the theoretical hypotheses were empirically supported.

Results showed that:

- Energy did not significantly predict any burn-out factor, therefore hypothesis 1 was not supported;

- Agreeableness did not significantly predict any burn-out factor, therefore hypothesis 2 was not supported;

- Consciousness did not significantly predict any burn-out factor, therefore hypothesis 3 was not supported;

Table 1:   Means, Standard Deviations and Correlations among Study Variables

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Energy	77,56	8,54	1								
2. Agreeableness	92,64	8,37	.24**	1							
3. Consciousness	88,68	8,08	.23**	.35**	1						
4. Emotional Stability	76,75	11,94	.03	.14	.12	1					
5. Openness	85,09	12,39	.36**	.33**	.34**	.29**	1				
6. Exhaustion	12,52	4,49	-.03	-.03	-.15	-.26**	-.09	1			
7. Deterioration	12,57	4,40	.02	-.12	-.13	-,21*	-.28**	.41**	1		
8. Ineffectiveness	11,55	4,22	-.11	-.15	-.20*	-.33**	-.21*	.37**	.27**	1	
9. Disillusion	11,52	5,23	.08	-.06	-.17*	-.23**	-.11	.50**	.47**	.43**	1

** p < .001; * p < .01.

- Emotional stability negatively predicted exhaustion (β = -.25, p < .01), professional inefficacy (β = -.33, p < .01) and disillusion (β = -.23, p < .01), thus partially confirming hypothesis 4;

- Openness negatively predicted detriment of the relationships (β = -.27, p < .001), thus partially confirming hypothesis 5.

DISCUSSION

The aim of the study was to verify the relationship between burn-out and personality; we hypothesized that helping professions' workers, in particular community educators, which had higher levels of personality resources could show lower levels of burn-out symptoms. Data analysis partially supported the hypothesis, showing the following results: energy, agreeableness and consciousness were found to be not significantly related to any burn-out factor; emotional stability was negatively related to psycho-physical exhaustion, professional inefficacy and disillusion, partially confirming hypothesis 4; openness was negatively related to detriment of relationships, partially confirming hypothesis 5.

Some of these results could seem unexpected, however the literature about personality and burn-out is not definitive. For example, Alarcon et al. (2009), in their meta-analytic review, conclude that "although our hypotheses simply predicted that each personality trait would be related to each of the three burnout dimensions, we should note that some personality traits yielded stronger relationships with burnout than did others" (p. 257).

The lack of relationships between energy and consciousness on the one hand and burn-out, on the other, maybe is explainable because these two personality characteristics can be considered as non-affective-oriented variables (Thoresen et al., 2003), while dimensions of burn-out are affective-oriented variables. This explanation is based on the assumption that affective-oriented variables will show stronger relationships with other affective-oriented variables than with non-affective variables (Weiss, 1996). Similar reasoning may also explain why emotional stability had significant relationships with three of the four dimensions of burn-out.

Concerning the absence of relationship between burn-out and agreeableness, in the literature review

have been found contradictory results: Deary et al. (1996) found no relationship between agreeableness and personal accomplishment; Zellars et al. (2000) reported similar results and found a weak negative relationship between agreeableness and depersonalization, whereas no relationship was found between agreeableness and the two other burnout variables.

The openness, which in our study was found to be negatively related to detriment of relationships confirmed the results of previous studies, which reported a positive relationship between openness and personal accomplishment considered the opposite of the detriment of the relationships) and a negative relationship between openness and depersonalization (Zellars et al., 2000).

The relationship between emotional stability and burn-out is the most frequent to be found in research (Bakker et al., 2006). In our study emotional stability was found to be negatively related with emotional exhaustion, professional inefficacy and disillusion. Individuals with emotional instability tend to experience negative and distressing emotions; this factor is characterized by fearfulness, irritability, low self-esteem, social anxiety, poor inhibition of impulses, and helplessness (Costa and McCrae, 1987). As Bakker et al. (2006) highlighted, previous studies (e.g., Deary et al., 1996; Hills and Norvell, 1991; LePine et al., 2004; Lingard, 2003; Zellars et al., 2000) on the relationship between neuroticism (that is the opposite of emotional stability) and burnout have shown that individuals who show high levels of neuroticism are more likely to report feelings of emotional exhaustion, lower levels of personal achievement, and – specifically for helping professions' workers – they tend to dehumanize their patients (depersonalization). In a study about the relationship between burnout and personality variables in intensive-care nursing staff, Buhler and Land (2003) found that individuals who were higher in neuroticism experienced higher levels of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. Also Cano-García, Padilla-Muñoz and Carrasco-Ortiz (2005) confirmed the hypothesis that the highest scores in burnout (greater emotional exhaustion, greater depersonalization and less personal accomplishment) were obtained with a high degree of neuroticism and introversion, in a sample of teachers.

At last, maybe helping professions' is not an unique and homogeneous professional category: it includes health care, social service work, teaching, and other

"caring" professions that have different emotional involvement with people. Researchers have demonstrated differences in dimensions of burnout for different service and caring professions (Singh *et al.*, 1994) and have developed taxonomies of "high-burnout" jobs based on their frequency of interactions (Cordes and Dougherty, 1993) and the emotion control needed while interacting with the public. In a study of Brotheridge and Grandey (2002) were found significant differences in the nature of prototypical emotional labor occupations (service/sales) and burnout occupations (caring work). The results suggested the existence of a hierarchy of emotional labor expectations, with human service professionals reporting the highest levels of frequency, variety, intensity, and duration of emotional display and expectations for control over emotional expressions. Our participants could be considered as "high-touch workers", because they often share many time with the persons they care: in fact they have the responsibility of the education of children and adolescence with personal and social difficulties. Certainly, some personality factors – as emotional stability – affect burn-out symptoms, as highlighted in previous studies and in present research; however, some job characteristics could explain burn-out, and future studies could compare different kind of helping professions' workers.

LIMITATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The study presents some limitations. First of all, study variables were measured from the same source (helping professions' workers) thus creating a single-source bias. Although statistical steps (Harman's single-factor test) provided an indication that a single factor does not account for all co-variances among the items, it would be better to control for this effect at the research design stage, i.e. future research should collect the ratings at different times and from separate sources.

A second limitation of the study is the cross-sectional measurement. It was not possible to test the causal relationships proposed in the theoretical framework. Despite this consideration, the use of structural equation analyses enabled us to demonstrate a series of hypotheses that were consistent with a causal theory

A further limitation of the study was the use of convenience sampling methods for data collection. While cross-sectional convenience samples may prove useful in exploring theoretical models, such as the one

built in the present study, caution should be exercised while generalizing the results beyond the current research. However, though this study supports existing research on the relationship between the big five personality traits and burnout, the use of Link Burn-out Questionnaire, which introduces a new dimension, the disillusion, in addiction to the traditional Maslach's three aspects (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, professional inefficacy), can be considered as an original novelty and a strenght of the study. Moreover, the results suggest future research indications, exploring the differences among different kind of helping professions' workers.

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