



Spirituality and Burnout Syndrome in employees of small companies in Mexico

Espiritualidad y Síndrome de Burnout en empleados de pequeñas empresas de México

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Abstract

The objective of this research was to measure the correlation between spirituality and Burnout Syndrome in employees working in small companies; it was a non-experimental, cross-sectional, quantitative, descriptive and correlational study. The working hypothesis was stated: the higher the level of spirituality, the lower the evidence of Burnout Syndrome. A total of 163 employees participated. The Personal Spirituality Scale (PSS) and the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) were used. In the EEP scale, at high level the intrapersonal dimension presents 49.7%, in interpersonal connection 68.1% and in transpersonal connection 54.6%. Within the results of the MBI questionnaire in emotional fatigue 58.3% was obtained, in depersonalization 46.6% and in transpersonal 52.4% at low level. In the Pearson correlation test a low negative correlation was found between general spirituality and emotional exhaustion with a very weak negative correlation.

Key words: Spirituality. Burnout syndrome. Employees. Small firms.

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Resumen

Para esta investigación se planteó el objetivo de medir correlación de espiritualidad y Síndrome de Burnout en empleados que se encuentran en pequeñas empresas, se trató de un estudio no experimental, trasversal, de enfoque cuantitativo, descriptivo y correlacional. Se enuncia la hipótesis de trabajo: a mayor nivel de espiritualidad menor evidencia de Síndrome de Burnout. Participaron 163 empleados. Su utilización: Escala de Espiritualidad Personal (EEP) y el cuestionario Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI). En la escala EEP, en nivel alto la dimensión intrapersonal presenta un 49.7%, en conexión interpersonal 68.1% y en conexión transpersonal 54.6%. Dentro de los resultados del cuestionario MBI en cansancio emocional se obtuvo un 58.3%, en despersonalización 46.6% y en transpersonal 52.4% en nivel bajo. En la prueba de correlación de Pearson se halló una correlación negativa baja entre espiritualidad general y en cansancio emocional con una correlación negativa muy débil.

Palabras clave: Espiritualidad. Síndrome de Burnout. Empleados.

Pequeñas empresas.

Introduction

There are many definitions of spirituality that try to link the most relevant aspects and factors in order to understand the transcendence of the human being, for example Alvarado & Pagan (2021) cite Van-Hook (2016) where it is said that spirituality helps people when they have gone through an event that caused a conflict, because in this way people are provided to develop courage, hope and relief. Spirituality also allows people to find meaning in their lives, to regain control of the circumstances they face and to focus on having a purpose in their lives (Stephens et al., 2013).

Throughout history and reviewing the literature it is mentioned that there are spiritual practices that have supported many people to resolve traumatic experiences, many authors highlight the practice of prayer in difficult times are objects of testimonies of helping practices, having the habit of reading sacred texts, support and belonging to a congregation helps to appease symptoms of distress and trauma, making people experience well-being by practicing these habits (Currier et al., Park et al., Ricard & Bergin 2005, 2014).

Kick et al. (2016) mention when practicing meditation and prayer in the military is a way to cope with post-traumatic stress disorders. Currier et al. (2017) highlight that the norms that are present in religious practices motivate a healthy life and work with morale, becoming supportive stimuli for a healthy life.

Fardin (2020) reviewed articles from 1978 to 2019 on the role that spirituality plays when crises occur, and in his results he found that it can be helpful for people to achieve peace of mind in times of difficulty, crisis and chronic diseases.

The authors Pirustinsky et al. (2020), in a research with 419 orthodox Jews where the impact of the pandemic and its relationship with spirituality was assessed, found that a positive relationship with the spiritual generates less stress and provides confidence. The World Health Organization UN (2024) integrated by all the members have concluded to apply an Integral Health Action Plan in the years 2013 to 2030 with the purpose of improving mental health with an integral attention, that adapts to the community environment and that takes into account prevention strategies strengthening scientific data to strengthen further research.

The UN Resolution 1781 of 1962 addressed the issue of forms of discrimination based on religion with the International Treaty on Religious Freedom, which provides cross-cutting and longitudinal protection with the participation of different UN agencies and International Human Rights Organizations (Jiménez & Caballero 2021). The World Health Organization (2000) specifies Burnout syndrome and contains many other ways of calling it as emotional discharge, professional burnout, burnout signs, the WHO mentions that it is an element of occupational risk, since the quality of life and mental health of employees is affected.

De Hert, (2020) provides that when people have difficulties to perform their work, not feeling competent, this will bring negative results as an employee, generating negative implications for the company in which he/she works.

Maslach (2004) defines Burnout as a form of inadequate representation of coping with chronic stress, with characteristics of personal decrease in work performance, depersonalization and emotional exhaustion.

Forbes (2011) exposes some components that develop burnout syndrome due to the dynamics with the work environment, such as the exaggeration of psychological, social and physical pressures that are generated on employees. All these elevated pressures result in workers responding with some illnesses that cause their health to deteriorate.

The dynamics in the workplace is linked to the circumstances, being in constant contact with colleagues and users, generates high demand and therefore stress, being under pressure within the workspace and generally excessive schedules, lead to unconscious activities with energy expenditure to meet the activities and objectives that have been assigned, to achieve them implies to be striving unrealistically.

Burnout is therefore a form of adaptation that the worker adapts psychologically within the stressful work environment. Cognitive organization within the company leads to failure and frustration when the employee realizes that the objectives are not achieved.

Materials and methods

The objective was to measure the correlation between spirituality in its three dimensions: three types of intrapersonal, interpersonal and transpersonal connection and Burnout Syndrome, taking into account the three dimensions: personal fulfillment, emotional exhaustion and depersonalization.

This research was non-experimental with a cross-sectional design, with a quantitative descriptive and correlational approach.

The working hypothesis is stated as follows: the higher the level of spirituality, the lower the Burnout Syndrome in employees of small companies. And as an alternative hypothesis: the higher the level of spirituality, the lower the level of Burnout Syndrome in employees of small companies.

Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to measure the concordance between the variables.

There were 163 participants, who are employees in small companies in the South of the State of Mexico, this southern region is located in the Mexican subtropics with coordinates of 18° 21' and 19° 34 latitude north of 99°16' and 100° 36' longitude. It is geographically bordered by three states Michoacán, Guerrero and Morelos. For the participation of the employees, inclusion criteria were included, such as working in a small company, regardless of age or schooling, the peculiarities of the employees are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. *Characteristics of employees of small businesses.*

Variable	Descripción	Frecuencia	Porcentaje
Sexo	Hombre	86	52.8
	Mujer	77	47.2
Edad	16 a 20	47	28.8
	21 a 30	97	59.5
	31 a 40	16	9.8
	41 a más	3	1.8
Escolaridad	Básica	17	10.4
	Bachillerato	55	33.7

Técnica	20	12.3
Licenciatura	66	40.5
otro	5	3.1

Personal Spirituality Scale (EPP), by González-Rivera et al., (2017), was applied, with 12 items with Likert-type scale, and three dimensions: Intrapersonal Connection, Interpersonal Connection and Transpersonal Connection, the answers range from 1 (Strongly Disagree to 4 (Strongly Agree). The lowest score is 12 and the highest score is 48. The higher the score, the greater the spirituality.

The psychometric properties contain an adequate internal consistency in the total scale of .84. In the subscales they range from .74 to .92, presenting an appropriate and valid measure to measure spirituality (González-Rivera et al., 2017) Maslach Buernout Inventori Questionnaire (MBI) containing 22 items with statements of attitudes and feelings of their profession was also applied to measure burnout. It contains responses ranging from 0=Never 1=Few Times 2=once a month or less 3=a few times a month 4=once a week 5=few times a week and 6=every day.

It contains three dimensions: Emotional Fatigue (EC), Depersonalization (DP) and Realization (RP). The subscales EQ and PD show higher burnout if higher scores are obtained, the PR is inversely higher burnout with low scores. The three dimensions together qualify the burnout syndrome as a constant that can be appreciated if Burnout is noticed, or if it does not exist. If high scores are obtained in at least one dimension, Burnout Syndrome exists.

To collect the data, we went to the workplaces of the employees of small companies, talked to the employer to request access to them, explaining the reason for the research.

Once permission was obtained, the employees were approached and the objective of the study was explained to them, inviting them to participate, if they accepted, the two instruments were shared with them, they were informed about how to fill them out, where the informed consent was also included and they were informed that the information would be confidential.

The employees began to answer the questions and the researcher was waiting to see if they had any doubts or questions. Once they had finished answering the instruments, they were checked to make sure that no answer had been omitted, thanking them for their valuable participation.

Once the data had been obtained, the SPSS version 26 program was used to obtain statistics, percentages and correlations.

Results

The results obtained in this research called Spirituality and Burnout Syndrome in employees of small companies are presented below: in the Personal spirituality scale, in high level the intrapersonal dimension presents 49.7%, in interpersonal connection 68.1% and in transpersonal connection 54.6%.

Within the results of the MBI questionnaire in its emotional fatigue dimension a percentage of 58.3% was obtained, in the depersonalization dimension 46.6% and in the transpersonal dimension 52.4% at a low level.

The employees develop their activities with a high level of spirituality, in its three dimensions they are the most representative. In the intrapersonal dimension 49.7%, in the interpersonal dimension 68.1% and in the transpersonal dimension 54.6%.

In Burnout Syndrome the low levels are the most representative, in the emotional exhaustion dimension 58.3%, in the depersonalization dimension 46.6% and in the realization dimension 52.4%.

In addition, the correspondence between general spirituality and the dimensions of Burnout syndrome in employees was measured with the Pearson coefficient, showing the existing associations in the variables.

Table 2. Relationship between general spirituality and Burnout Syndrome dimensions.

		Espiritualidad General	Cansancio emocional	Despersonaliz ación	Realizac ión
Espiritualidad General	Correlación de Pearson	1	-0.117	-.210**	.211**
	Sig. (bilateral)		0.143	0.008	0.007
	N	163	157	159	159
Cansancio emocional	Correlación de Pearson	-0.117	1	.771**	.224**
	Sig. (bilateral)	0.143		0.000	0.005
	N	157	157	153	153
Despersonalización	Correlación de Pearson	-.210**	.771**	1	0.075
	Sig. (bilateral)	0.008	0.000		0.353
	N	159	153	159	156
Realización	Correlación de Pearson	.211**	.224**	0.075	1
	Sig. (bilateral)	0.007	0.005	0.353	
	N	159	153	156	159

Table 2 shows the results of the Pearson correlation test, finding a low negative correlation between general spirituality and the dimension of emotional exhaustion with a very weak negative correlation with a value of -0.117 , in the same way in general spirituality and the dimension of depersonalization there is a very weak negative correlation with a value of $-.210$ and finally in general spirituality and the dimension of realization with a value of $.211$. In this way, the working hypothesis is rejected and it is concluded that there is no revealing relationship between spirituality and Burnout Syndrome.

In the EPP, results were obtained that showed that in the Interpersonal Connection dimension at the high level, 68.1% was obtained. It is considered that people who have this ability have a background that contains skills and knowledge that are part of the characteristics of a person that allow them to relate to the physical and social environment that surrounds them. Because spirituality is an intangible aspect, it can be difficult to put it into practice in the workplace. Obregón et al. (2021) propose helping business owners to generate practices and programs that promote the practice of spirituality in the workplace to improve the well-being of workers.

In the Interpersonal Connection dimension, aspects are taken into account that focus on how people relate socially, their social identities, and living with others. Von Soest et al. (2020) mention that opening up spaces for new bonds in the workplace allows its members to reduce feelings of loneliness, which is a protective factor. This data coincides with what Gallardo-Peralta & Sánchez-Moreno (2020) found, where they found high levels of spirituality in their participants. They conclude that spirituality allows people to get to know each other and feel satisfied with themselves.

Also, giving people the opportunity to belong to groups where spirituality is practiced allows them to have resources to face the loss of family, health and friends, which are events inherent to human growth (Thumala et al., 2020).

This dimension takes into account the bond between people, involving interest, common social activities and emotions. Interpersonal relationships are basic to social existence, in all contexts, in the workplace, with a group of friends, with family, within marriage, everywhere there is coexistence between two or more people who need to be in constant communication.

In the intrapersonal dimension of spirituality, 49.7% of employees scored high. This dimension is the knowledge that the person has of himself, in this way he can count on elements that can help him to manage and know his emotions, capacities, interests, motivations and feelings. People who have this skill can cognitively analyze their behaviors and emotions to orient themselves effectively in whatever they set out to do. Álvarez et al., (2017) consider that knowing oneself is mastering the techniques of self-knowledge in order to promote individual improvement.

Since spirituality is something impalpable, it is a strategy that is not easy to carry out in the workplace. Obregón et al, (2021) Proposes training company managers with theoretical material containing efficient practices, as well as programs that encourage

the practice of spirituality in work contexts. Since there is little theoretical material at present and therefore in-depth research is required that can be applied to specific workspaces, according to the activity of the employees (Adawiyah and Pramauka, 2017; Obregón et al., 2021)

The low levels reported in Burnout Syndrome in the dimensions of emotional exhaustion with 58.3%, in the depersonalization dimension 46.6% and the fulfillment dimension 52.2%, Achour et al., (2021) in a research they conducted found that people who practiced spirituality helped themselves to be able to positively manage work stress. And that, in addition, the people participating in the study remained positive and practiced behaviors of empathy and understanding. They highlight a difference between married and single people, where people with married status showed greater spirituality (Bouzanjani et al., 2021)

Pfeifer (2018) mentions that people feel the need to talk about spirituality-related issues when they are ill or undergoing a medical procedure that has affected their health. And Albaqawi et al; and Reig-Ferrer et al; (2019) propose a mental and spiritual sphere for people to integrate their capacity in a positive way in all areas of their lives. All these researchers agree that spirituality can play a protective role in preventing the development of Burnout Syndrome and can be a protective factor for employees. Also the authors Anczyk (2021), Glaz (2021), Prusak & Wasiewicz (2021) and Rigoli (2021) mention that the role of spirituality in the lives of employees, with the stress after the pandemic, many employees have been able to find support resources in spirituality, to organize their life, giving it focus and meaning, with a system of values, which has allowed them to face problematic situations in life, which otherwise could have turned into mental disorders.

Concurs Perrone (2016) in his research reports that the factor of spirituality protects against the development of Burnout Syndrome. The factors of spirituality are grouped with higher levels of personal success at work. When working with the Pearson correlation in the results, there is a low negative correlation between general spirituality and the dimensions of Burnout Syndrome. In the emotional exhaustion dimension, there is a negative value of -0.117, in the depersonalization dimension a negative value of -.210, and in the accomplishment dimension a value of .211.

These results do not agree with what Ardiles-Irrazaba and his collaborators found in (2022) in their research called Spirituality and academic burnout in nursing students in times of pandemic where they found low levels of spirituality, 93.5% in the self-awareness dimension, 75.9% in spiritual beliefs, needs and practices. A weak positive correlation was observed in spiritual practices with a .184. in depersonalization .364, emotional exhaustion .238 and fulfillment .297. They mention that they do not agree with other previous research such as that of Abu et al. (2018) and Ahmadi et al., (2012) where it can generally be concluded that spirituality is related to the field of mental health, to have resilience and general well-being.

Lizano et al. (2019) found that spirituality is an ally in the prevention of illnesses, syndromes, ailments and the promotion of well-being at work. Sharma and Sharma (2018) & Yang and Fry (2018) mention that spirituality is a source of strength that results in resilience applied to the lives of employees in order to avoid burnout. De Diego-Cordero et al (2022) also mentioned that when a strong link between identity and the workplace is maintained, this has positive effects in mitigating the negative effects caused by depersonalization.

Conclusions

Spirituality provides employees of small companies with elements that enable them to face the daily challenges of work and stress. Spirituality can give meaning to their work, reducing the feeling of tiredness and exhaustion and developing the ability to adapt effectively to the effects of work pressures.

Spirituality represents a protective factor for Burnout Syndrome, providing support to prevent the development of symptoms of anxiety and stress. Likewise, spirituality helps to find a clear purpose in life, which is often associated with emotional exhaustion.

Relating Burnout Syndrome to spirituality provides an opportunity to develop understanding among employees in small companies. If left unattended, Burnout would lead to deterioration due to chronic stress, low self-esteem, psychosomatic problems, job dissatisfaction, exhaustion, fatigue and anxiety, all of which would have a direct impact on the institution.

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