

The Effect of Psychological Hardiness, Communication Conflict and Spiritual Leadership on Burnout in Islamic Azad University of Sabzevar

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ABSTRACT: The present study has aimed to examine the effect on psychological hardiness, communication conflict and spiritual leadership on job burnout in the Islamic Azad University of Sabzevar. The present study was a descriptive and causal research. A questionnaire was used to collect the required data. The statistical population of this research consisted of employees of Islamic Azad University of Sabzevar (180 employees). According to the Morgan's table, the sample size was 118 people. To ensure the return of the questionnaire, the research questionnaire was distributed among 130 employees who were selected using the simple randomized sampling technique. The obtained data was analyzed using the structural equations model and LISERL software. The results indicated that psychological hardiness had a negative impact on employees' burnout. It was also concluded that communication conflict had a positive impact on the employees' job burnout. Also, it was made clear that spiritual leadership had a negative effect on the employees' burnout. Generally, it is recommended to Azad Universities to make sure employees are familiar with and committed to the organization's vision. It is important for them to illustrate a clear vision to their employees so that the employees would believe in it and pay special attention to it. Leaders of the organization must dare to be honest with their employees. These organizations need honest and modest leaders.

Keywords: psychological hardiness, communication conflict, spiritual leadership, burnout.

INTRODUCTION

Burnout syndrome is not a fundamentally mental disorder, but it develops slowly over time and may become a disability (Hakimshoshtari et al., 2018). Burnout has various dimensions such as emotional fatigue, depersonalization and personal incompetence. It can be affected by improper working conditions, feelings of organizational inefficiency, lack of personal development, limited opportunities for promotion and existence of rigid rules and regulations in the organizations (Sotodehasl & Bakhtiyari, 2007). Regardless of the source and severity of the stress and the pressures employees are under, research shows that employees dealing with such pressures respond to them in a variety of ways. In other words, burnout arises from various factors, one of the most important of which is "personality traits". Many theories have attempted to review the relationship between occupations and personality traits (Beckstead, 2002). Lu's research in the Philippines shows that personality traits such as low self-confidence and self-efficacy are related to

burnout (Leilanie, 2016). In the present study, the effect of three variables, i.e. spiritual leadership, psychological hardiness and communication conflict, on professional burnout has been examined.

Leadership has long been the focus of researchers, scientists, and even ordinary people. It is safe to say that all triumphs, failures, constructions and destructions and in general, the happiness and misery of mankind throughout history have all been dependent on correct or incorrect leaderships. New approaches to leadership have been introduced in recent years, such as transformational leadership, servant leadership, compassion leadership, value-based leadership, situational leadership, visionary leadership and democratic leadership. Among these approaches, spiritual leadership has a special place (Sen & Eren, 2019). Spiritual leadership is associated with teamwork, thinking, understanding and valuing in a society. It focuses on the basic needs of the leader as well as the followers in relation to spiritual survival. As a result, a suitable environment is created for the organization to be successful which then leads to beneficial personal consequences such as an improvement in physical and mental health. All of this results in a more committed and productive organization (Aydin & Ceylan, 2009). The goal of spiritual leadership is to meet the spiritual needs of the leader and the followers, in the respect of survival of spirituality and spiritual well-being through a sense of membership and meaningfulness of work so there would be a vision, insight and value alignment at an individual, team and organizational level (Zare'ee Matin et al., 2017). Ultimately, spiritual leadership would positively improve mental health, organizational productivity and commitment (Gholami et al., 2015). No one other than the leader of the organization can restore the health of the organization. Although managers usually delegate various responsibilities such as the responsibilities associated with strategy, technology, marketing or financing, to their subordinates; but they cannot outsource matters such as cultural health of the organization. In other words, organizational health and success in the workplace are originated from two different sources. The first source is the style of leadership and how direct managers treat the employees. The second source is the organizational policies that improves creativity and cooperation (Sharifi & Aghasi, 2017). Nowadays, along with other theories, the spiritual leadership theory (spirituality-based leadership) has been proposed, which is to some extent in line with the transformational approach to leadership. It is believed that in this new global context, this style of leadership can save organizations from turbulent conditions. Leaders exercising this approach are capable of cultivating and improving spirituality in the workplace (Daneshvarmaroost, 2016). According to the study conducted by (Strack et al., 2018) the leadership style of managers who are more inclined to spirituality has been more effective than the style of managers who have neglected spirituality. Thus, they believe that there is a positive relationship between spirituality and leadership. Given that nowadays one of the most prominent factors in the success of organizations to meet their organizational purposes is to have a healthy and dynamic manpower, it is quite crucial to pay attention to the employees' problems and to address their concerns. There are stressful factors in all organizations and there are also a variety of ways to deal with these factors and managing them. However, in places with special working conditions, a large number of mental problems are also detected. These mental pressures and issues cause a complication called burnout over time. Employees working in operational areas have to tolerate humid, tropical, and environmentally polluted areas, as well as being away from their families, working long and irregular working hours, etc. Due to these conditions, they have to cope with various occupational stressors for a long period of time, which will then lead to the rise of symptoms of burnout (Saatchi, 2016).

Spiritual leadership can improve the employees' performance and effectiveness by (Bell, 2018) the motivation of the most important asset of the organization, i.e. human resources. Furthermore, university is one of the most prominent institutions that are responsible for the growth and development of human resources. Educational organizations in general and universities in particular need to encourage incentives and increase the motivation of their employees to be able to overcome issues caused by rapid environmental changes and to improve their development trend. This is because of the fact that a creative and motivated human resource acts as the main factor when it comes to the development and enhancement of wealth in today's world. Additionally, universities are among the most significant scientific axes and are practically the most important base for the development of science. In addition, psychological hardiness and communication conflict are the other research variables whose impact on burnout will be investigated. Therefore, it can be argued that burnout is a potential problem that working professionals in various fields, especially employees offering services to customers or dealing with strict governmental rules and regulations, might face at some time or another. Another important point about burnout is its direct and indirect costs. Employees' absence from the workplace, reduced work quality, interpersonal conflicts with colleagues, mental and physical problems, changing jobs and leaving a job altogether can all be caused by burnout. When an employee leaves their position, the organization faces enormous costs. Based on the reported information, in the European Union, 20 million euros is dedicated annually to the costs associated with professional stress and burnout. This figure is 350 million dollars in the United States per year (Zahed Babelan & Moenikia, 2010).

Communication conflict is another variable examined in this research. Conflict arises when a person understands that the other party is in disagreement with them or intend to prevent them from achieving their goals. Trends such as

constant changes in the work procedure, diversity of staff composition and more teamwork have made conflict inevitable in today's world. One factor that desirably solves conflicts is the selection of an efficient and effective approach in solving these conflicts (Hakimshoshtari et al., 2018). Conflict management includes activities that are performed to use the existing conflicts to help the organization move forward with more dynamicity. These conflicts are sometimes used to develop an innovative spirit and to create more comprehensive methods (Sotodehasl & Bakhtiyari, 2007). Furthermore, psychological hardiness is a single structure originated from the coordinated performance of three interrelated factors. The relationship between psychological relationship and quality of life has been examined in many studies. According to (Beckstead, 2002), a hard and stubborn personality structure acts as a protective barrier against stress and consists of three components: commitment, control and a fighting spirit. Commitment (as opposed to self-alienation) refers to a person's tendency to being deeply involved in doing something. Committed people are less likely to give up in stressful situations. Control is the belief that life events and their consequences can be forecasted. A person with a sense of control cares more about their own effort than the luck and chance factor and believes that they can manage what happens in their surrounding with their efforts. A fighting spirit is the belief that life changes are normal and natural and one has to have a positive perception of such changes (Leilanie, 2016).

Many studies in the past have examined the effect of factors such as age, marital status, gender, education, environmental factors and type of profession on professional burnout. There are also some studies that have focused on the three factors of communication conflict, psychological hardiness and spiritual leadership, separately. There are only a few studies that have reviewed the relationship between one of these factors burnout. The present study has aimed the relationship between each of these three variables and the burnout complication. The results of this research could potentially help the managers of Shargh Oil and Gas Exploitation Company in managing burnout by improving the variables of communication conflict and psychological hardiness as well as increasing the spiritual leadership variable.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present study was a descriptive and causal research. A questionnaire was used to collect the required data. The statistical population of this research consisted of employees of Islamic Azad University of Sabzevar (180 employees). According to the Morgan's table, the sample size was 118 people. To ensure the return of the questionnaire, the research questionnaire was distributed among 130 employees who were selected using the simple randomized sampling technique. The independent variables in this research were psychological hardiness, communication conflict and spiritual leadership and burnout was the hidden dependent variable. In conducting the research, first the participants were presented with preliminary and detailed explanations about the measurement tool and the purpose of the test, as well as how to answer the questions. Regarding ethical considerations, the respondents were asked to sign a consent form and were presented with the necessary information, they were assured that the obtained information will only be used in this research and will not be abused in any way. A researcher-designed questionnaire was used to measure the research variables.

RESULTS

This questionnaire contained questions that were able to measure the research variables. The questionnaire was designed on the Likert five-point scale. To confirm the validity of the tool, a copy of the questionnaire was given to professors. Then, the ambiguous, heavy and incomprehensible questions and those unrelated to the topic, realm or statistical population of the research were removed from the questionnaire and a number of questions were modified. To determine the reliability of the questionnaire, the Cronbach's alpha method was used. The results showed that questionnaire was desirably reliable (Table 1).

Table 1. Cronbach's alpha value.

| Variable | Number of questions | Cronbach's alpha |
|-------------------------|---------------------|------------------|
| Psychological hardiness | 13 | 0.798 |
| Communication conflict | 9 | 0.824 |
| Spiritual leadership | 10 | 0.768 |
| Professional burnout | 12 | 0.784 |

The conceptual model of the research is as follows (Figure 1):

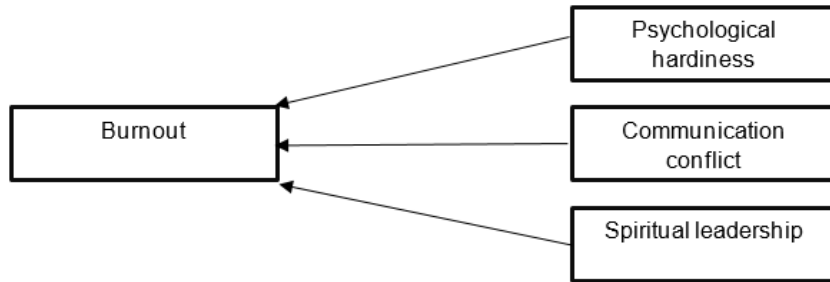


Figure 1. Conceptual model of the research

(Table 2) displays the mean and standard deviation of the research variables.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of the research variables.

| Variable | Mean | Mode | Standard deviation | Minimum | Maximum |
|-------------------------|---------|-------|--------------------|---------|---------|
| Psychological hardiness | 3.3007 | 3.406 | 0.63523 | 1.54 | 4.85 |
| Communication conflict | 2.7850 | 2.78 | 0.72812 | 1.11 | 4.78 |
| Spiritual leadership | 3.2048 | 3.10 | 0.64917 | 1.40 | 5.00 |
| Burnout | 2.61210 | 2.71 | 0.59683 | 1.06 | 4.46 |

To examine the fitness of the model, the chi-square/degree of freedom ($\frac{\chi^2}{df}$), comparative fitness index (CFI), goodness of fit index (GFI), adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI), normed fit index (NFI), non-normed fit index (NNFI) and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) were used. As shown in (Table 3), all fitness coefficients are within the permitted scope. chi-square/degree of freedom ratio was 2.16 and also, all other coefficients, i.e. GFI, CFI, NNFI, NFI, AGFI are all higher than 0.9 and RMSEA is also lower than 0.1. This all confirmed the desirable validity of the measurement model.

Table 3. Fit indices of the measurement model.

| Row | Model indices | fit | Index | After | Desired limit | Result |
|-----|------------------------------------|---------|-------------|-------|---------------|-----------------|
| 1 | Chi-square/degree of freedom | of | χ^2/df | 2.95 | 3 > | Acceptable |
| 2 | Root square error of approximation | mean of | RMSEA | 0.034 | 0.1 > | Goodness of fit |
| 3 | root square residual | mean | RMR | 0.088 | Around zero | Acceptable |
| 4 | Normed index | fit | NFI | 0.99 | 0.90 < | Very good |
| 5 | Non-normed index | fit | NNFI | 0.93 | Around one | Very good |
| 6 | Comparative index | fit | CFI | 0.97 | 0.90 < | Very good |
| 7 | Relative index | fit | RFI | 0.91 | 0.90 < | Very good |
| 8 | Incremental index | fit | IFI | 0.96 | 0.90 < | Very good |
| 9 | Goodness of fit index | of fit | GFI | 0.93 | 0.90 < | Very good |
| 10 | Adjusted goodness of fit index | | AGFI | 0.96 | 0.90 < | Very good |

In testing the research hypothesis using the structural equations model, first, the software output was indicative of the suitability of the fitted structural model for testing the first hypothesis. The obtained hypotheses are significant when their significance test value is higher than 1.96 and lower than -1.96. As seen in the table, the significance coefficient of the relationship between psychological hardiness and burnout among employees is -5.96. Therefore, the structural model shows that psychological hardiness has a negative impact on the professional burnout of all employees of the Islamic Azad University of Sabzevar city and psychological hardiness has an impact on employees' burnout with the value of 0.52. The significance coefficient between communication conflict and burnout among employees is 6.06. Therefore, the structural model shows that communication conflict has a positive effect on the burnout of employees of Azad University of Sabzevar city and communication conflict has an impact of 0.68 on the employees' burnout. the significance coefficient between spiritual leadership and employees' burnout equals -5.91. Thus, the structural model shows that spiritual leadership has a negative impact on the burnout of employees of Azad University of Sabzevar city and spiritual leadership has an effect on the employees' burnout of the value of 0.51 (Table 4).

Table 4. The results associated with the existing relationships in the research model.

| Factor load | significance level | Existing relationship in the model | Result |
|-------------|--------------------|--|-----------|
| -0.52 | -5.96 | Psychological hardiness has a negative impact on the employees' burnout. | Confirmed |
| 0.67 | 6.06 | Communication conflict has a positive impact on the employees' burnout. | Confirmed |
| -0.51 | -5.91 | Spiritual leadership has a negative impact on the employees' burnout. | Confirmed |
| | | Burnout in this organization is in a desired condition. | Confirmed |

Based on the analysis, the conceptual model of the relationships between the variables is as follows (Figure 2).

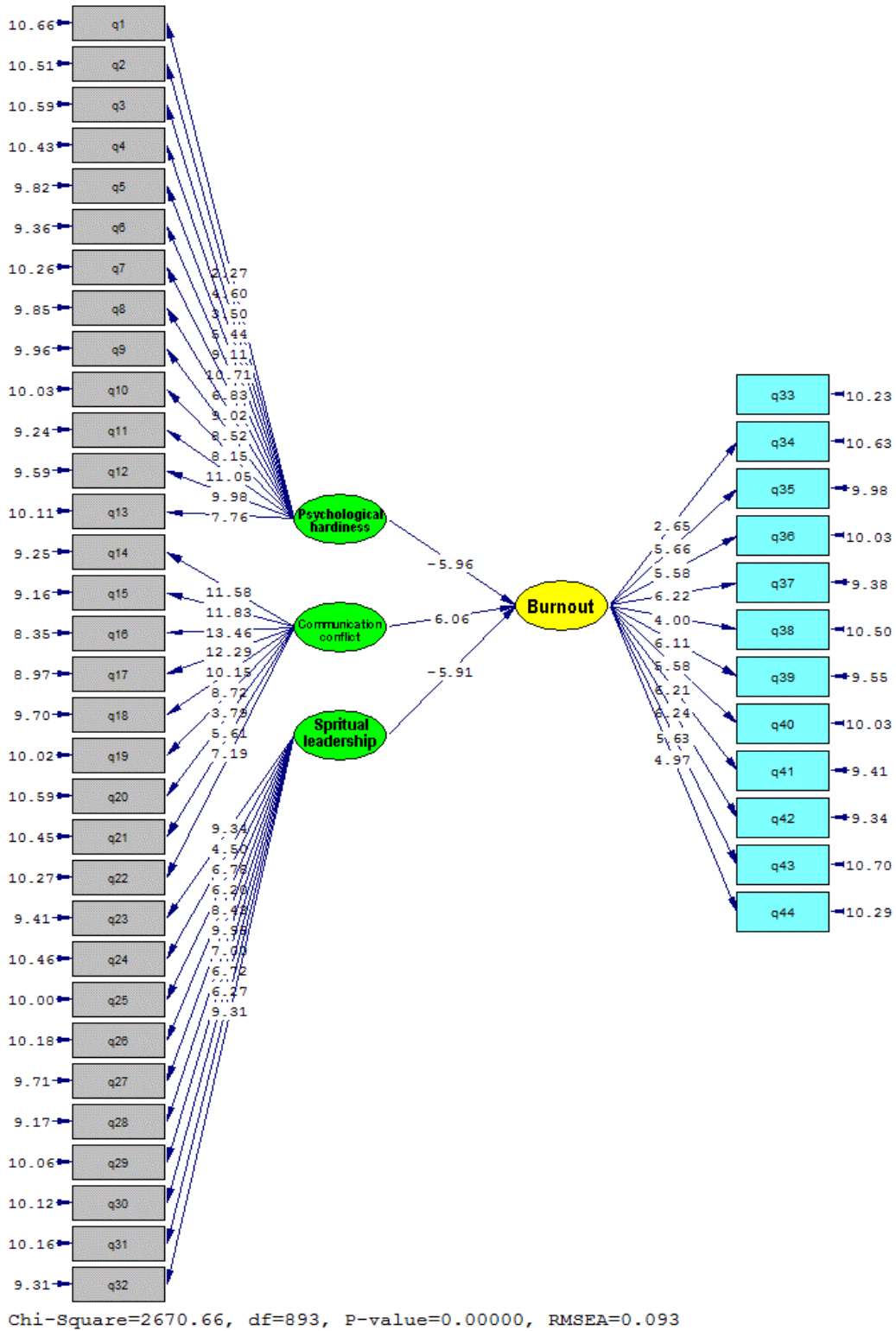


Figure 2. Conceptual model of the relationship between the variables at the standard estimation mode

DISCUSSION

The present study has aimed to examine the effect of psychological hardiness, communication conflict and spiritual leadership on professional burnout in the Azad University of Sabzevar city. The results showed that psychological hardiness has a negative impact on burnout. This finding is in compliance with the results obtained in the studies done by (Sen & Eren, 2019), (Aydin & Ceylan, 2009), (Zare'ee Matin et al., 2017). Given that a safe workplace and job security have been identified as the most effective factors in improving the employees' performance, thus improving this factor by applying the following methods will be effective in enhancing the performance of employees of various administrations. To make the employees more efficient and effective, their abilities and desires have to be enhanced. Furthermore, one of the responsibilities of the managers is to develop and improve the abilities and motivation of their employees. Since people behave based on their perception of reality, managers must provide the employees with a positive and clear image of their performance, abilities, motivation and skills.

(Sen & Eren, 2019) have conducted a study and reviewed the relationship between burnout, perceived social support and psychological hardiness and mental health of nurses. Their results showed that there was a statistically significant and positive relationship between the nurses' psychological hardiness and their burnout. They also concluded that there was a statistically significant and negative relationship between the nurses' mental health and their perceived social support and psychological hardiness. Based on their predictive model, the three variables of burnout, perceived social support and psychological hardiness have been able to predict 54.9% of the changes in the mental health of nurses. (Aydin & Ceylan, 2009) have done a research and examined the relationship between hardiness, resilience and burnout among health workers in Kamyaram health organization. Based on their findings, the results of Pearson correlation coefficient were indicative of a direct relationship between resilience and hardiness. They also showed that there is a diverse and significant relationship between resilience and emotional analysis and also there is a diverse and significant relationship between resilience and depersonalization. It was also shown that there is a diverse and significant relationship between resilience and emotional analysis as well as a diverse and significant relationship between resilience and depersonalization. According to their findings, there is no significant relationship between resilience and hardiness and lack of personal success. Therefore, resilience and hardiness were predictors of burnout of health workers working in the health center of Kamyaran city. (Gholami et al., 2015) conducted a study and examined the relationship between psychological hardiness and the level of burnout and the mental health of employees of Kerman University of Medical Sciences. Based on their important findings, there is a positive relationship between psychological hardiness and dimensions of commitment, control and fighting spirit and mental health and there is a negative relationship between professional burnout and dimensions and emotional fatigue, pessimism, lack of effectiveness and lack of a sense of power and mental health. Ultimately, they proposed some recommendations for future studies. (Sharifi & Aghasi, 2017), in a study, reviewed the relationship between the psychological hardiness and burnout of nurses. Based on their results, the majority of the research sample were between 26 and 30 years of age (40%), most of whom were women. In addition, the result of this research are indicative of a diverse relationship between the hardiness and burnout of nurses which can result in the inclusion of hardiness variables in the nurses' formal and informal trainings. By doing so, the nurses' vulnerability to stress would be reduced and the level of their professional burnout would be controlled.

The results also showed that communication conflict has a positive effect on burnout, which is compatible with the results obtained in the studies conducted by (Daneshvarmaroost, 2016). Developing communication skills and paying attention to communication barriers is of crucial importance in the respect of solving organizational conflicts. Understanding organizational conflicts is not possible without considering communications. In other words, it can be argued that many individual, organizational and social problems are rooted in the lack of an effective communication, a defected communication system or in general any kind of miscommunication. An effective communication is only established when the perception of the recipient of a message is in compliance with what the sender intended. The existence of the organization is endangered without cooperation and cooperation is not possible without establishing effective communication. Miscommunications among co-workers may lead to disagreements and conflicts. These miscommunications disturb the performance of the organization. (Daneshvarmaroost, 2016), in his dissertation, called "the relationship between communication skills and professional ethics and burnout of employees of Marvdasht Education Administration", studied 90 employees of Marvdasht Education Administration. He found out there is a positive and significant relationship between the variables of communication skills and professional ethics of the employees. He also found out that there is a negative and significant relationship between the professional ethics and burnout of employees. (Strack et al., 2018) conducted a study and examined the relationship between the job

satisfaction and conflict management and burnout of the employees. The findings showed that there is a positive and significant relationship between job satisfaction and the problem-solving style. In addition, a diverse and significant relationship was also seen between the control style and job satisfaction. The non-coping style does not have a significant relationship with job satisfaction and the three components of burnout (emotional fatigue, depersonalization, lack of personal success) have a diverse and significant relationship with total satisfaction. It was also concluded that there is a diverse and significant relationship between the problem-solving style and emotional fatigue. Given the correlation between employees' satisfaction and burnout, control styles and problem-solving style, managers can use efficient methods to affect the behaviors of their employees and increase their efficacy and effectiveness to meet the organizational goals. Some of these methods are as follows: paying salaries in proportion with the employees' work experience and abilities, providing educational facilities and professional promotion, honest treatment and respect, proper and timely encouragement and appreciation, division of labor based on merit and competence, evaluation of employees' performance and providing the right feedback. (Bell, 2018) conducted a study and reviewed the relationship between burnout, quality of life and the ability to work to prevent conflict at the workplace. The results obtained from our study shows high scores in burnout, low scores for the quality of work life in the people who registered and the excellent working ability in the majority of workers. The results were indicative of the presence of a high level of burnout. They also showed that there is no significant relationship between the workers' quality of work life and work life conflicts.

CONCLUSION

Finally, the results showed that spiritual leadership has a negative effect on burnout, which is compatible with the hypothesis of the studies done by (Daneshvarmaroost, 2016), (Leilanie, 2016). Managers have to make sure employees are familiar with and committed to the organization's vision. It is important for them to illustrate a clear vision to their employees so that the employees would believe in it and pay special attention to it. Leaders of the organization must dare to be honest with their employees. These organizations need honest and modest leaders. (Daneshvarmaroost, 2016) did a research entitled "is burnout decreased by applying spiritual leadership in the hospitals?. By investigating 396 of the employees of Ardabil, they came to the conclusion that spiritual leadership has a diverse relationship with burnout. They also concluded that the correlation between the variables of spiritual leadership and emotional fatigue and depersonalization is significant and diverse. (Leilanie, 2016) studied the relationship between spiritual leadership and psychological capital and the professional burnout of nurses. Based on their results, there is a significant and diverse relationship between leadership and the variables of vision, belief in work, membership, organizational commitment and psychological capital and also between the variables of resilience and burnout. They also concluded that the relationship between burnout and the variables of love for altruism, a sense of meaningfulness, application of spiritual leadership approach and self-efficacy, hopefulness, optimism is not significant.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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