

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/337749944>

# Is meaningful work the silver bullet? Perspectives of the social workers

Article in *Journal of Asia Business Studies* · October 2019

DOI: 10.1108/JABS-09-2018-0267

CITATIONS

19

READS

580

3 authors:



**Kim Lim Tan**

James Cook University Singapore

39 PUBLICATIONS 323 CITATIONS

[SEE PROFILE](#)



**Tek-Yew Lew**

Curtin University Malaysia

25 PUBLICATIONS 457 CITATIONS

[SEE PROFILE](#)



**Adriel K.S. Sim**

Curtin University Sarawak

13 PUBLICATIONS 202 CITATIONS

[SEE PROFILE](#)

Some of the authors of this publication are also working on these related projects:



M-payment [View project](#)



Meaningful Work [View project](#)

# Is meaningful work the silver bullet? Perspectives of the social workers

Kim-Lim Tan, Tek-Yew Lew and Adriel K.S. Sim

Kim-Lim Tan is based at the Curtin University Malaysia, Miri, Malaysia and Human Capital Leadership Institute, Singapore, Singapore.  
Tek-Yew Lew and Adriel K.S. Sim are both at the Curtin University Malaysia, Miri, Malaysia.

## Abstract

**Purpose** – *The purpose of this paper is to examine the effectiveness of meaningful work against dimensions of job burnout, with psychological capital (PsyCap) as the mediator.*

**Design/methodology/approach** – *Data from 223 social workers were analyzed using the partial least squares–structural equation modeling.*

**Findings** – *As expected, meaningful work displayed a positive, direct and significant relationship with PsyCap. Contrary to expectations, meaningful work did not establish a negative direct relationship with all, but one dimension of job burnout. However, the results showed that it had indirect relationships with all job burnout dimensions through PsyCap where it displayed a mediating influence over the relationship.*

**Practical implications** – *Given the malleable attributes of PsyCap and the results showing meaningful work being a strong predictor of PsyCap, this study suggests that organizations should focus on imbuing greater meaningfulness in work to improve social workers' PsyCap, which is essential in reducing their propensity for experiencing job burnout.*

**Originality/value** – *This is one of the first studies to explore in detail the effects of meaningful work on the dimensions of job burnout, with PsyCap being the mediator. This study has advanced the body of knowledge on meaningful work by contesting the claim that meaningful work was an effective predictor in reducing job burnout. In addition, this study has extended the understanding of the upward-spiral concept and the resource caravan concept.*

**Keywords** *Meaningful work, Psychological Capital, Social workers, Job burnout*

**Paper type** *Research paper*

## Introduction

Bolstered by the belief that a happy employee is one that delivers a return on investment, many organizations today are constantly looking at their employees' well-being to improve performance and productivity. On average, an organization could expect a three to five dollar return for every dollar of investment in employee well-being (Rath and Harter, 2010). With its intuitive appeal and burgeoning research, meaningful work promises to be “the next big thing that organizations should leverage on to improve performance” (Steger, 2017, p. 60). It is for these reasons that scholars such as Steger (2017) have advocated that organizations should move “beyond engagement and commitment and strive for meaningful work” (p. 60).

It has been established over the past decade that employees experiencing meaningful work are more likely to manifest desired behavior. For instance, they reported higher levels of well-being (Arnold *et al.*, 2007), positivity in emotions (Steger *et al.*, 2013), as well as being more satisfied with life (Allan *et al.*, 2016a). Other benefits include lower propensity of facing burnout (Creed *et al.*, 2014), higher job satisfaction (Allan *et al.*, 2018), clarity of career aspirations (Steger and Dik, 2010), enhanced organizational commitment (Jung and Yoon, 2016), lower intentions of resigning (Fairlie, 2011) and superior work performance

Received 30 September 2018  
Revised 16 March 2019  
Accepted 20 April 2019

(Tong, 2018). Similarly, industry reports have demonstrated the growing importance of meaningful work among employees. For instance, the Asian Millennium Workforce and the Travel Industry survey have shown that almost half of the respondents agreed meaningful work was a key driver for employee engagement and connection, and 20 per cent of the respondents were prepared to accept a lower salary in exchange for more meaningful work (McKinsey, 2014). Another global survey showed that 73 per cent of 23,000 respondents indicated the ability to find a greater purpose in work helped them in achieving job satisfaction (LinkedIn, 2016).

Despite the growing research, gaps remain. First, research to date focused on the effect of meaningful work within for-profit settings (Nawrin, 2018; Vidwans and Raghvendra, 2016; Jung and Yoon, 2016). Little is known about the effects of meaningful work in non-profit organizations (NPOs). Considering that many employees working in NPOs are driven by its altruistic mission, Park *et al.* (2018) have highlighted the source of their motivation might be distinct, as they work in a unique organizational context and operate with fewer resources compared to for-profit organizations. Therefore, we argue that the direct application of findings obtained from past studies focusing on for-profit organizations might not be applicable.

Second, studies examining the effects of meaningful work on respective dimensions of job burnout are conspicuously missing. Job burnout is a common phenomenon that happens to all professions including nurses (Ang *et al.*, 2016), educators (Arens and Morin, 2016), health workers (Dreison *et al.*, 2016), church ministers (Buys and Rothmann, 2010), students (Chang *et al.*, 2015), hospitality staff (Chiang and Liu, 2017), physical instructors (Clapper and Harris, 2008), social workers (Travis *et al.*, 2016) and civil servants (Hao *et al.*, 2015). While Fairlie (2011) showed that meaningful work could address job burnout, other studies have revealed differentiated effects from the same predictor could be observed across the dimensions of job burnout (Bakker *et al.*, 2000; Roncalli and Byrne, 2016). In addition, Lizano's (2015) systematic review of 19 studies found all but two observed differential impacts on job burnout dimensions. The inconsistency in the findings necessitates further investigation on the effects of a singular unique predictor on the dimensions of job burnout. Maslach and Jackson (1981) have pointed out the importance of having a separate examination of the burnout dimensions, which by having a composite score might mask nuanced interrelationships between the various burnout dimensions and the predictor. Taken together, this study extends the body of knowledge of meaningful work on the dimensions of job burnout, which earlier studies did not provide for.

Finally, several lines of inquiry (Isaksen, 2000) have suggested individual personalities, such as psychological capital (PsyCap), may affect the construction and deconstruction of one's perception of work, which can influence the magnitude of outcomes. However, this hypothesis has not been widely tested. While many of the existing studies have examined how job, organizational and societal levels may affect individuals' perception of work (Allan *et al.*, 2016b), it is ultimately, the person and the environment that influence the degree of meaningful work in an organization. This study provides a comprehensive understanding of meaningful work by establishing if and how PsyCap affects the relationship between meaningful work and the dimensions of job burnout.

Putting these gaps together, this study unravels the complexity of meaningful work and its effectiveness in addressing job burnout. This study has responded to the issue raised by Brenninkmeijer and VanYperen (2003) to analyze job burnout as a multidimensional construct. By incorporating PsyCap, this study explores in depth the relationship between a job and personal resources. In the process, it makes theoretical contributions by examining the gain spiral concept and reaffirming on the necessity of setting up a resource caravan as advocated by Hobfoll (2014) within organizations. Finally, it responds to Bakker and Demerouti's (2017) call to further test the effects personal resources have on job demands.

## Theoretical framework

### *Job demands–resources theory and conservation of resources theory*

The theory and research into meaningful work and PsyCap, against dimensions of job burnout has pointed towards the relevance of individuals leveraging these resources to mitigate the negative effects arising from work. On this premise, we argue that the conservation of resources (COR) theory and the job demands–resources (JD-R) theory are particularly relevant to this study. The JD-R theory is widely used as an organizational framework in explaining the role of job characteristics in affecting job burnout. The robustness of the theory has been widely supported across both cross-sectional and longitudinal studies (Alarcon, 2011; Crawford *et al.*, 2010; Lizano and Mor Barak, 2015). The key tenant within the JD-R theory spotlights the imbalance in either one of them, with excessive demands or insufficient resources will trigger a health impairment process, causing an individual to experience feeling emotionally exhausted, cynical and discrediting all former accomplishments (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007). Similarly, the presence of resources or the absence of strains provide individuals with the motivation to fulfill their work requirements (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017).

Attracted by the motivational properties inherent in resources, the COR theory suggests that individuals are constantly seeking to retain and build on their resources to mitigate the effects against stress (Halbesleben *et al.*, 2014). Hobfoll (2011) further clarified that resources are “objects, personal characteristics, conditions, or energies that act as conduits to the achievement or protection of valued resources” (p. 339) and stress occurs when individuals perceive a potential loss in their resource (Hobfoll, 2011). To manage stress, individuals would “either be using the residual resources to restore loss or obtain new resources or withdrawing their efforts to conserve resources” (Montani *et al.*, 2018, p. 124). Within the COR theory, the key principles of gain spiral and resource caravans are of relevance to this study. The principle of gain spiral explains the mutual generation of resources where the presence of one resource will foster the development of another resource, leading to the creation of a resource caravan that is a “collective pool of resources available within that organisational ecology, and individuals’ and groups’ ability to access those resources” (Hobfoll, 2011, p. 118). A resource caravan will address the requirements for homeostatic regulation, allowing employees facing job demands to select a matching resource in managing it.

In line with both theories, this study suggests that individuals who experience high job demands run the risk of experiencing one or more dimensions of job burnout. Therefore, individuals would use the advantage of the resource of meaningful work to gain new resources such as the enhancement of an individual’s PsyCap. These theories aligned with the concepts of gain spiral as well as the resource caravan, which states that resources do not exist in isolation but have the capacity to generate more resources improving one’s emotional well-being.

## Literature review

### *Meaningful work and dimensions of job burnout*

Work has been a central focus in one’s life. Individuals spend the majority of the time in their work, which according to Rosso *et al.* (2010), is also the environment where one finds one’s identity, purpose and sense of belonging. While not many would stop and think if their work was meaningful, many scholars still maintain the view that meaningful work is something everyone strives to achieve at a certain point of time (Hoole and Bonnema, 2015). This is because work possesses the motivational potential for achieving self-actualization, which every individual aspires to attain and every employer hopes to leverage on (Pratt *et al.*, 2013). This reflects the complex and multi-dimensional construct of meaningful work that has been conceptualized by various scholars such as Steger *et al.* (2012) and Lips-

Wiersma and Wright (2012). From the various definitions observed, meaningful work is more than the simple execution of tasks. It is a phenomenon where individuals transcend their individual concerns and focus more on issues outside themselves, as they accept a greater purpose in their lives through engagement with their work.

For social workers, the work they perform carries a special meaning. Reports have shown the vast majority enjoyed their work with a sense of fulfillment as the key reason keeping them in their profession (Murray, 2015). However, it is noted that they are highly susceptible to burnout (McFadden *et al.*, 2018; McFadden, 2015). Recent articles from Ireland (Murray, 2017), Canada (The Chronicle Herald, 2017) and the USA (Torpey, 2018) highlighted that a key reason of social workers leaving the profession was because of emotional burnout. These elucidated that job burnout among social workers is not restricted to specific countries but is a widespread phenomenon requiring greater attention. These contradicted other claims (Fairlie, 2011) that meaningful work was an effective predictor of job burnout, which this study will examine in greater detail.

Maslach *et al.* (2001) described job burnout as conditions where individuals display a lack of mental energy, a negative working attitude, cynicism toward stakeholders and discrediting one's previous achievements. The literature argued that job burnout is a manifestation of accumulated job demands, and most of the interventions have focused on providing various resources to facilitate the reduction of job demands for employees (Ahola *et al.*, 2017; Bakker *et al.*, 2005; Cole *et al.*, 2012). Yet, there has been a constant discourse on whether job burnout should be treated as a unidimensional or a multi-dimensional construct.

The arguments for embracing a multi-dimensional construct is anchored against the point that each dimension is independent of one another and reporting as a unidimensional construct represents a loss of information (Van Dierendonck *et al.*, 2001; Koesk and Koesk, 1989). Conversely, proponents of a unidimensional construct maintain that reporting as a single score provides an overall view of understanding the effect of job burnout within the model (Brenninkmeijer and VanYperen, 2003). However, it was theorized that burnout happens in a sequential progression with single dimension precipitating to the next (Golembiewski, 1999), others claimed it could happen simultaneously but independently (Maslach, 1993). From this review of the literature, experiencing burnout does not necessarily require the occurrence of three dimensions. Considering the complex and dynamic nature of job burnout, interventions to alleviate job burnout must be calibrated carefully to address the unique characteristics of each dimension. Given the inconsistencies in the findings where social workers, despite finding their work meaningful, continue to experience job burnout, this study examines in detail, if meaningful work can effectively address the different dimensions of job burnout. The first set of hypotheses is:

H1a. Meaningful work negatively influences depersonalization.

H1b. Meaningful work negatively influences emotional exhaustion.

H1c. Meaningful work negatively influences reduced personal accomplishment.

### ***Meaningful work and psychological capital***

As part of positive psychology, Luthans *et al.* (2007) defined PsyCap as:

[...] an individual's positive psychological state of development that is characterized by (a) having confidence (efficacy) to take on and put in the necessary effort to succeed at challenging tasks; (b) persevering towards goals and, when necessary, redirecting paths to goals (hope) in order to succeed; (c) making a positive attribution (optimism) about succeeding now and in the future; and (d) when beset by problems and adversity, sustaining and bouncing back and even beyond (resilience) to attain success (p. 542).

Among the various characteristics of PsyCap, one key attribute is its state of malleability. Being malleable means that PsyCap is non-state like and evolving, implying organizations could make use of these unique characteristics of PsyCap to enhance employees' efficiency, work performance and in strengthening their competitive advantage. In this regard, [Srivastava and Maurya \(2017\)](#) have argued work environments that "incorporate challenges, opportunities, flexibility, learning, recognition and growth" ([Srivastava and Maurya, 2017](#), p. 226) supported the flourishing of PsyCap.

Additionally, [Kahn and Fellows \(2013\)](#) have argued that meaningful work supports the manifestation of these conditions. Meaningful work consists of foundational and relational attributes. Foundational attributes refer to the nature of the work role, while relational attributes focus on relationships with others ([Kahn and Fellows, 2013](#)). This aligns with other conceptualizations where meaningful work involves purpose and transcendent meaning ([Rosso et al., 2010](#); [Steger et al., 2012](#)). In sum, it appears that meaningful work is an ideal environment to develop employees' PsyCap. Besides, this assumption aligns with the concept of the gain spiral where meaningful work might manifest positive emotions among employees, and as a result, trigger their PsyCap. The hypothesis regarding the nature of this relationship is posited as follows:

*H2. Meaningful work positively influences PsyCap.*

### ***Psychological capital and dimensions of job burnout***

PsyCap as a form of personal resource manifests desirable employee behaviors such as a higher level of job satisfaction, improved employee engagement and enhanced organizational commitment ([Abbas et al., 2014](#); [Luthans et al., 2007](#); [Cheung et al., 2011](#)). [Siu et al. \(2014\)](#) demonstrated that individuals with higher PsyCap displayed a lower propensity of turnover. Like employed individuals, PsyCap is a critical resource for unemployed individuals as well. [Rani's \(2015\)](#) study on unemployed youths in India revealed that PsyCap has a significant positive relationship with psychological well-being. These views suggest that PsyCap is an important resource for individuals, as it provides them with hope, optimism and resilience in managing their job and daily livelihood demands.

Although PsyCap has proven to be a strong predictor against various job demands, little work has been done to examine PsyCap's role against the respective dimensions of burnout. More current literature such as [Fairlie \(2011\)](#) and [Cheung et al. \(2011\)](#) have treated job burnout as a unidimensional construct. A seminal work by [Bianchi et al. \(2017\)](#) has spotlighted that "the three components of burnout are examined individually and the scores of each subscale are not combined into a single total score" (p. 3). Moreover, [Roncalli and Byrne \(2016\)](#) have found that rapport with coworkers had an inverse relationship with two burnout dimensions, which are emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, but not with reducing personal accomplishments. Similar conclusions are drawn from [Alacacioglu et al. \(2009\)](#) where the effect on emotional exhaustion and depersonalization are significantly higher for a younger group of respondents. Industry survey results corroborated with these views showing individuals could experience depersonalization and emotional exhaustion yet feeling proud of their accomplishments ([McFadden, 2015](#)). Drawing from all these, it shows that there is no one-size-fits-all intervention in addressing job burnout. Hence, there is a need to consider adopting differentiated interventions to effectively manage job burnout. Given there have been limited studies examining PsyCap on all dimensions of job burnout as a personal resource within the JD-R model, we, therefore, postulate the followings:

*H3a. PsyCap negatively influences depersonalization.*

*H3b. PsyCap negatively influences emotional exhaustion.*

*H3c.* PsyCap negatively influences reduced personal accomplishment.

### ***PsyCap as the mediator***

Anchoring against the COR theory and the JD-R theory, we have earlier argued and postulated that meaningful work positively influences PsyCap. At the same time, we hypothesized that PsyCap has had a negative influence over the dimensions of job burnout. Taken together, it was logical to assume PsyCap has acted as a mediator for the relationship between meaningful work and the dimensions of job burnout. This has been consistent with earlier studies where PsyCap was deployed as a mediator in several contexts such as occupational stress and job burnout (Li *et al.*, 2015), human resource management practices and creativity (Gupta, 2014) and leadership and creativity (Gupta and Singh, 2014). In fact, this study has responded to Albrecht's (2013) call to further explore the role of PsyCap as "psychological processes assumed to underlie the associations that have not been fully explored and have not been widely tested" (p. 245). Based on this discussion, the final set of hypotheses is:

*H4a.* PsyCap mediates the relationship between meaningful work and depersonalization.

*H4b.* PsyCap mediates the relationship between meaningful work and emotional exhaustion.

*H4c.* PsyCap mediates the relationship between meaningful work and reduced personal accomplishment.

## **Method**

### ***Research setting***

Social work is a rewarding yet an emotionally charged profession. Social workers handle issues that many publics would want to avoid (Chiller and Crisp, 2012). They focus on individuals, families and societies in an effort to improve their social functioning and well-being (Truell, 2018). Social work is one of the fastest growing professions internationally. For example, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) estimated a 16 per cent growth of social workers from 2016 to 2026 (BLS, 2016). While in Singapore, it has been estimated 3,000 new job opening in the social service sector across different professions could be expected from 2017 to 2019 (Tai, 2017).

Coupled with an ageing population, changing working norms and rising social expectations, social workers around the world have evolved from a dyadic client-worker mentality to become a macro-practitioner by assuming the role of a vehicle for change, and being an advocate for the community (Beckett, 2017). Social workers face ever-increasing job demands, leading to a resource deficit, with the inevitable consequence of feeling burnout, and eventually leaving the profession (Hombrados-Mendieta and Cosano-Rivas, 2013). With every departure, organizations suffer decreasing productivity and performance as the quality of care to clients is compromised, leading to a damaged reputation and a lack of goodwill (Welander *et al.*, 2016). Despite advances in social work practices, there are relatively few studies that have examined the motivations and concerns of social workers (Kwok, 2017). This study is therefore timely, as the results may help organizations in developing more effective interventions to complement their existing recruitment, retention and motivation strategies.

### ***Measures and analysis***

Meaningful work was measured using the weighted and meaning inventory (WAMI) that is developed by Steger *et al.* (2012). WAMI is a 10-item instrument on a five-point Likert scale with "1" = "Absolutely Untrue" to "5" = "Absolutely True". WAMI is widely adopted and



deployed across different contexts such as examining the relationship between meaningful work and one's propensity of accepting lower salaries (Hu and Hirsh, 2017), positive disposition (Steger *et al.*, 2013) and work stress (Allan *et al.*, 2016a, 2016b). For this study, the composite reliability score for WAMI ranges from 0.79 to 0.86.

The psychological capital questionnaire (PCQ) was adopted to measure PsyCap. Developed by Luthans *et al.* (2007), PCQ measures PsyCap using a 24-item instrument on a six-point Likert scale of "1" = "Strongly Disagree" and "6" = "Strongly Agree". The reasons for adopting PCQ are attributed to:

- PCQ is used in almost all studies on PsyCap (Avey *et al.*, 2011).
- PCQ is developed based on established studies on the dimensions of hope (Snyder, 2002), efficacy (Parker, 1998), resilience (Wagnild and Young, 1993) and optimism (Scheier and Carver, 1985).
- PCQ is previously used beyond the context of employment, including mental health (Krasikova *et al.*, 2015), group effectiveness among students (Vanno *et al.*, 2015) and neurosciences (Peterson *et al.*, 2008).

For this study, the composite reliability score for PCQ ranges from 0.81 to 0.86.

Job burnout was measured by the Maslach Burnout Index (MBI). The MBI is a 22-item survey, covering the three aspects of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reducing personal achievement, over a seven-point Likert-scale with "0" = "Never" to "6" = "Everyday". Developed by Maslach and Jackson (1981), MBI is considered as the "standard tool for research in this field and has been translated and validated in many languages" (Maslach and Leiter, 2016, p. 104). Owing to the reliability and validity of MBI, it is further developed to cater to different occupational groups, such as medical personnel, human services, educators and students. This customization, which is not seen in other instruments, allows more precise measurement of burnout (Koesk and Koesk, 1989). For this study, we adopted the MBI–Human Services Survey (MBI-HSS), which is designed for professionals in human services that focus on improving individual lives by providing guidance and preventing harm. This includes physicians, social workers, nurses and counselors. The composite reliability score for MBI-HSS ranges from 0.83 to 0.92.

Partial least squares–structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) was used as the analytical method as this study adopted a reflective-formative higher-order constructs model for the constructs of meaningful work and PsyCap. As highlighted by Finn and Wang (2014), erroneous measurement perspectives can lead to an "overestimation of the structural parameters for its effects and compromising on the content validity of the construct" (p. 2821). With covariance-based SEM not designed to handle formative constructs, the PLS-SEM was the ideal choice, as one of its notable strengths is its "capacity to handle formatively specified measurement models without limitation" (Ringle *et al.*, 2018, p. 8). In addition, the PLS-SEM placed fewer restrictions on distribution normality and sample size requirements that allow it to reliably estimate complex models with few observations (Sarstedt *et al.*, 2014).

### ***Data collection***

Through the assistance of the Singapore Association of Social Workers (SASW), the web-based instrument was sent to its accredited members. A convenience sampling method was adopted, as the full list of SASW members was not made available for reasons of data privacy. An invitation was sent electronically and contained a uniform resource locator, which respondents used to access the web-based survey. It explained the purpose of the study as well as reassuring anonymity and confidentiality. Web-based survey was the best choice, as social workers are constantly out of the office attending to cases. Moreover, it



offered additional advantages such as convenience, allowing for variation in design and a shorter transmitting time (Fan and Yan, 2010).

Being the only association representing Singapore social workers, this survey was disseminated by SASW to their members, which Fan and Yan (2010) believed would result in a higher response rate. Two reminders were sent out subsequently. The contents of each reminder were customized to reflect the progress of data collection, at the same time, providing assurances of confidentiality and anonymity. These email reminders created a sense of urgency where respondents would put a higher priority on completing and returning the survey (Sánchez-Fernández *et al.*, 2012). In total, 223 responses were received over a five-month period. G\*power analysis showed the minimum sample size required with three predictors, an effective size of 0.15 with a power of 80 per cent was 77. At 223 respondents, the power achieved was 99.9 per cent. With this, the PLS-SEM can be performed with the sample size of 223 respondents, as it had exceeded the required minimum number. There were no missing cases or incomplete data.

## Results

### *Data preparation*

Prior to the conduct of any analysis, we assessed the common method variance (CMV). The CMV is a form of systemic error variance shared by the constructs and may cause inflation and deflation of path coefficients, resulting in either Type I or Type II errors (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003; Kock, 2015). To reduce CMV, a temporal separation was created between the predictor and the criterion set of instruments with the insertion of questions on demographics. In addition, instruments of different scale endpoints were used to reduce “method biases caused by commonalities in scales and anchoring effects” (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003, p. 888). Finally, the assurance of anonymity, confidentiality and the reiteration of the importance of respondents’ honest responses were made at every available opportunity. Statistically, Harman’s single-factor test showed the largest factor explained 24.23 per cent of the variance, which was less than the threshold value of 50 per cent. (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). This showed that the deployment of procedural remedies had diminished the risk of CMV biasing the results.

### *Descriptive analysis*

Among the 223 respondents, 82.1 per cent were female and the remaining male. The majority ranged from 25 to 34 years old (34.5 per cent). More than half (57.8 per cent) had a bachelor’s degree as their highest qualification. In terms of years of experience, most of the respondents (41.3 per cent) had more than 10 years of experience. Table I reports the correlation matrix of this study.

### *Measurement model*

The measurement model of first-order constructs was tested first. It involves assessing the convergent validity and the discriminant validity. The convergent validity assesses the degree of similarity between the indicators of the specific construct using the factor loadings, composite reliabilities (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) (Hair *et al.*, 2017). Table II shows the CR of all the constructs ranged from 0.793 to 0.922. The first-order constructs had achieved the required threshold value of 0.70, indicating a high level of internal consistency of the measures. Similarly, Table II demonstrates the AVE of all the constructs had achieved the required threshold value of 0.5. Most outer loading of the items exceeded the threshold value of 0.708, with a handful of them such as DP4, EX4 and EX8 falling short of it. They were retained as their respective CR and AVE exceeded the threshold value of 0.5 (Ramayah *et al.*, 2018).

**Table I** Correlation matrix

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Gender <sup>a</sup>	1.942	0.235	—								
2. Education <sup>b</sup>	2.780	0.736	−0.127*	—							
3. Years of experience <sup>c</sup>	3.480	1.372	−0.109	0.181**	—						
4. Age <sup>d</sup>	3.081	1.330	−0.187**	0.175**	0.660**	—					
5. Meaningful work	4.162	0.507	−0.068	−0.021	−0.004	0.060	—				
6. PsyCap	4.606	0.532	−0.071	0.023	0.153*	0.198**	0.492**	—			
7. Emotional exhaustion	2.817	1.259	0.135*	−0.051	−0.179**	−0.194**	−0.342**	−0.560**	—		
8. Depersonalization	1.504	1.111	0.099	−0.0965	−0.253**	−0.231**	−0.216**	−0.394**	0.622**	—	
9. Reduced personal accomplishments	1.308	0.810	0.062	0.036	0.019	−0.065	−0.500**	−0.537**	0.347**	0.295**	—

**Notes:** *n* = 223; <sup>a</sup>Gender was coded as: 1 = male, 2 = female; <sup>b</sup>Education was coded in categories: 0 = others, 1 = doctorate, 2 = master, 3 = bachelor, 4 = diploma; <sup>c</sup>Years of experience was coded in categories: 1 = less than 1 year, 2 = 1-3 years, 3 = 4-7 years, 4 = 8-years, 5 = more than 10 years; <sup>d</sup>Age was coded in categories: 1 = 18-24, 2 = 25-34, 3 = 35-44, 4 = 44-54 years, 5 = 55-64 years. \**p* < 0.05; \*\**p* < 0.01

Discriminant validity is the degree of distinctiveness among the various constructs (Hair *et al.*, 2017). Using the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) criterion, Table III shows the discriminant validity was achieved at HTMT<sub>0.90</sub>. Taking both tables together, the measurement model displayed internal consistency and reliability, as well as achieving convergent and discriminant validity.

### Structural model

Before the structural model could be analyzed, a multi-collinearity assessment was administered through the variance inflation factor (VIF). Table IV shows the VIFs for each of the construct were below the cutoff value of 5.0, meaning that collinearity was not present between the constructs. From Table IV, surprisingly the results indicated meaningful work did not have any significant relationship with job burnout dimensions of depersonalization (*H1a*:  $\beta = 0.026$ , *p* = 0.375) or emotional exhaustion (*H1b*:  $\beta = -0.064$ , *p* = 0.163). However, the results did show meaningful work had a negative significant relationship with reduced personal accomplishment (*H1c*:  $\beta = -0.312$ , *p* < 0.001). Also, meaningful work was shown to have a positive significant relationship with PsyCap (*H2*:  $\beta = 0.522$ , *p* < 0.001). On the effectiveness of PsyCap as a predictor, results showed PsyCap had a negative significant relationship with all dimensions of job burnout, including depersonalization (*H3a*:  $\beta = -0.426$ , *p* < 0.001), emotional exhaustion (*H3b*:  $\beta = -0.564$ , *p* < 0.001) and reduced personal accomplishments (*H3c*:  $\beta = -0.399$ , *p* < 0.001). The results showed PsyCap had a mediating effect on the relationship between meaningful work and depersonalization (*H4a*:  $\beta = -0.222$ , *p* < 0.001), emotional exhaustion (*H4b*:  $\beta = -0.294$ , *p* < 0.001) and reduced personal accomplishments (*H4c*:  $\beta = -0.208$ , *p* < 0.001). Consequently, all hypotheses except *H1a* and *H1b* were supported. Figure 1 and Table IV summarize the results of the structural model.

Other than examining the significance of the hypothesized relationships, Table IV shows the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ), effect sizes ( $f^2$ ) and predictive relevance ( $Q^2$ ) of the model. The  $R^2$  value showed that meaningful work and PsyCap explained 17.1 per cent of variances in depersonalization, 36.0 per cent of variances in emotional exhaustion, and 38.7 per cent of variances in reduced personal accomplishments. Cohen (1988) classified the  $R^2$  value of depersonalization as a moderate model, while emotional exhaustion and reduced personal accomplishments were substantial models. Similarly, meaningful work explained 27.2 per cent of variances in PsyCap, making it a substantial model. Table IV shows meaningful work had a negligible effect in producing the  $R^2$  value for depersonalization and emotional exhaustion, which may explain its insignificant relationship. On the other hand, meaningful work displayed a small effect size in producing the  $R^2$  value for reduced personal accomplishments, but a substantial effect size of 0.374 was found in producing the  $R^2$  value for PsyCap. Meanwhile,

**Table II** Measurement model

<i>Variables</i>		<i>Outer loadings</i>	<i>Composite reliability</i>	<i>Average variance extracted (AVE)</i>
Depersonalization	DP1	0.737	0.828	0.550
	DP2	0.814		
	DP3	0.784		
	DP4	0.611		
	DP5	*removed*		
Emotional exhaustion	EX1	0.819	0.922	0.570
	EX2	0.805		
	EX3	0.822		
	EX4	0.639		
	EX5	0.869		
	EX6	0.758		
	EX7	0.708		
	EX8	0.611		
	EX9	0.724		
Reduced personal accomplishments	PA1	*removed*	0.874	0.537
	PA2	0.757		
	PA3	0.791		
	PA4	0.685		
	PA5	0.638		
	PA6	0.709		
	PA7	0.803		
	PA8	*removed*		
Positive meaning at work	PM1	0.738	0.869	0.625
	PM2	0.776		
	PM3	0.794		
	PM4	0.849		
Greater good motivation	GG1	0.622	0.793	0.564
	GG2	0.827		
	GG3	0.788		
Meaning-making through work	MM1	0.752	0.844	0.643
	MM2	0.841		
	MM3	0.809		
Efficacy	EF1	0.679	0.860	0.507
	EF2	0.761		
	EF3	0.729		
	EF4	0.753		
	EF5	0.656		
	EF6	0.686		
Hope	HO1	0.543	0.864	0.518
	HO2	0.684		
	HO3	0.669		
	HO4	0.819		
	HO5	0.798		
	HO6	0.770		
Optimism	OP1	0.745	0.831	0.503
	OP2	*removed*		
	OP3	0.825		
	OP4	0.779		
	OP5	0.472		
	OP6	0.670		
Resilience	RE1	0.706	0.812	0.520
	RE2	0.710		
	RE3	*removed*		
	RE4	0.785		
	RE5	*removed*		
	RE6	0.679		

**Table III** Discriminant validity

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Depersonalization										
2. Efficacy	0.332									
3. Emotional exhaustion	0.747	0.372								
4. Greater good motivation	0.267	0.452	0.343							
5. Hope	0.476	0.699	0.606	0.584						
6. Meaning making through work	0.199	0.329	0.307	0.760	0.497					
7. Optimism	0.522	0.434	0.654	0.441	0.749	0.382				
8. Reduced personal accomplishment	0.398	0.500	0.435	0.583	0.639	0.460	0.523			
9. Positive meaning at work	0.230	0.334	0.409	0.851	0.607	0.887	0.449	0.603		
10. Resilience	0.363	0.660	0.520	0.465	0.738	0.345	0.713	0.543	0.382	

**Note:** Discriminant validity achieved at HTMT<sub>0.90</sub>

PsyCap was observed to have produced moderate and substantial effects in producing  $R^2$  value for dimensions of job burnout. Finally, the  $Q^2$  values for all the exogenous constructs were larger than zero, indicating they had predictive relevance for endogenous constructs.

## Discussion

The objective of this study was to examine the relationship of meaningful work on dimensions of job burnout, with PsyCap as the mediator among social workers working in Singapore. The results reveal the overall positive appraisal of the work environment was significant in generating positive emotions, triggering an individual's PsyCap, a critical resource in influencing on one's well-being.

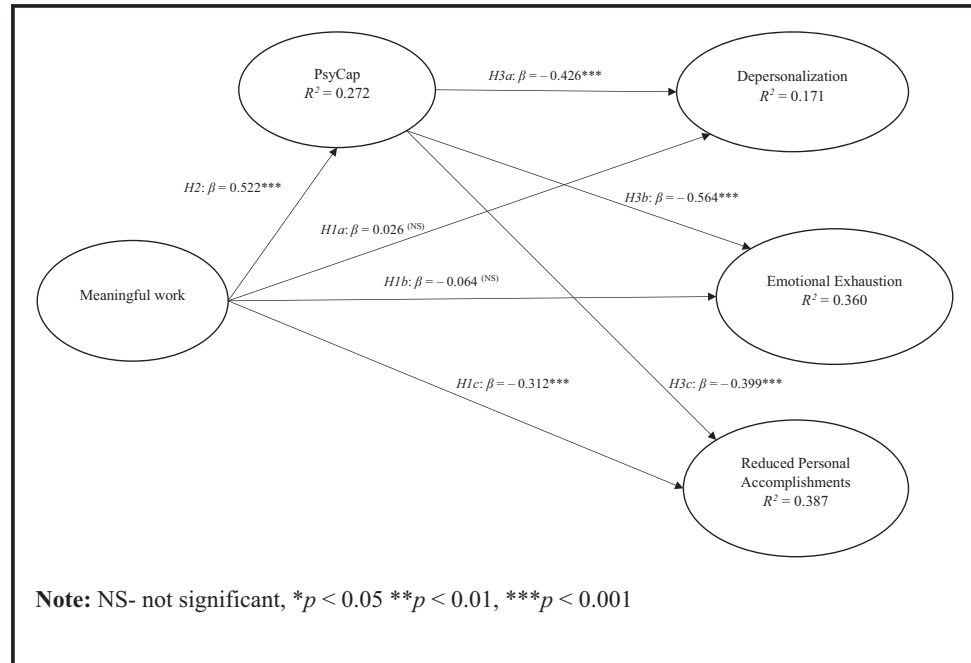
Contrary to our expectations, meaningful work has differential impact on the dimensions of job burnout. One possible reason could be social workers view their work as a "calling" and are aware of the meaningfulness their profession would manifest as well as the challenging environment that they would operate in. In other words, efforts to imbue meaningfulness into their work, when they already know "what was in it for them" would have a limited effect on social workers. For-profit organizations, on the other hand, would typically leverage the idea of meaningful work to invoke emotions such that it "optimizes occupational opportunities in such a way that employees' motivation, effort and productivity are enhanced" (Steger, 2017, p. 71). In summary, this demonstrates that "what characterizes meaningful work tasks differs according to work context" (Vidman and Strömberg, 2018, p. 117).

The results show social workers who perceive work as meaningful improved their sense of self-efficacy but did not reduce their emotional exhaustion or depersonalization. This may explain why social workers experience burnout despite finding meaning in their work. Of the dimensions, Bakker *et al.* (2000) claimed that the manifestation of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization are due to the presence of job stressors, while reduced personal accomplishments was a manifestation of a lack of resources. The results aligned with Alarcon's (2011) argument that resources had a stronger relationship with reduced personal accomplishments.

Concomitantly, the direct effect of PsyCap on various dimensions of job burnout suggests PsyCap is a key resource supporting social workers in navigating through their job demands in a positive manner and in the process, reducing their propensity for experiencing job burnout. This study's findings corroborate with other previous studies where PsyCap has contributed to an individual's well-being (Tüzün *et al.*, 2018; Datu *et al.*, 2018). The importance of PsyCap in social workers is further demonstrated from two

Table IV Hypotheses testing										
Hypotheses	Path coefficient	Standard error	t-value	5.00%	95.00%	VIF	R <sup>2</sup>	f <sup>2</sup>	Q <sup>2</sup>	
H1a	0.026	0.080	0.318 (NS)	−0.110	0.153	1.374	0.171	0.001	0.149	
H1b	−0.064	0.066	0.982 (NS)	−0.172	0.042	1.374	0.360	0.005	0.334	
H1c	−0.312	0.071	4.388 ***	−0.438	−0.200	1.374	0.387	0.115	0.361	
H2	0.522	0.058	9.032 ***	0.408	0.602	1.000	0.272	0.374	0.141	
H3a	−0.426	0.065	6.537 ***	−0.524	−0.311	1.374		0.159		
H3b	−0.564	0.058	9.641 ***	−0.655	−0.465	1.374		0.362		
H3c	−0.399	0.067	5.926 ***	−0.506	−0.284	1.374		0.189		
H4a	−0.222	0.041	5.355 ***	−0.292	−0.156					
H4b	−0.294	0.047	6.316 ***	−0.367	−0.218					
H4c	−0.208	0.041	5.071 ***	−0.275	−0.142					

Notes: NS = not significant; \*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

**Figure 1** PLS structural model results

additional perspectives. First, the results show that medium and substantial effect sizes were observed in producing the changes of  $R^2$  values across the various dimensions of job burnout. Second, the results from mediation analysis reveal that meaningful work had an indirect effect on the dimensions of job burnout through PsyCap. These results align with findings from other settings where PsyCap was found to be an effective mediator (Moyer *et al.*, 2017; Paek *et al.*, 2015).

### Theoretical implications

This study contributes to the literature in several ways. The first contribution made by this research lies in the effect of meaningful work against the dimensions of job burnout, with PsyCap as the mediator. Arguably, this seems to be the most important contribution by this study because of the absence of any existing literature examining the relationship between these variables within the same model. This study extended the findings of earlier studies, such as Peng *et al.* (2013), where they treated job burnout as a unidimensional construct. Such conceptualization of job burnout as a unidimensional construct has been questioned, as it “imply that individuals who suffer only from emotional exhaustion, only from depersonalization, or only from reduced personal accomplishment will be considered as suffering from the same condition, namely, ‘burnout,’ though they present with symptom profiles that are, by definition, different and potentially call for different management strategies” (Bianchi *et al.*, 2017, p. 3). Besides, research practices of adopting a composite score for burnout are inconsistent with Maslach *et al.* (1996) where they specifically mentioned that scores of each dimensions should be computed individually and should not be combined into one score. Following this line of argument, this study unravels fresh perspective that meaningful work alone is not a silver bullet in alleviating job burnout experienced by social workers. It shows that meaningful work, as a predictor, addresses only one out of the three dimensions. Evidently, the present result contrasts with previous studies such as Fairlie (2011) which suggest that meaningful work is an effective predictor in addressing job burnout.

This study shows that to address job burnout effectively, especially for individuals who are motivated by the inherent meaningfulness of the work, it requires a complementary resource, which this study revealed it as PsyCap. The mediation finding further explains that PsyCap is a key resource in facilitating social workers to have a positive appraisal of their work environment. Though earlier studies such as [Wright and Hobfoll \(2004\)](#) attempted to identify the effect of personality resources to dimensions job burnout, they did not conceptualized personality resources as personality traits per se. Rather, [Wright and Hobfoll \(2004\)](#) operationalized personality resources as psychological well-being which uses the [Berkman \(1971\)](#) scale that measures respondents' state of mental health ([Sharma et al., 2013](#)). From this perspective, we extend the understanding on the role of personal resources, in the form of PsyCap, demonstrating that PsyCap as a higher-order composite construct of hope, efficacy, resilience and self-efficacy that influences the experiences of job burnout in the emotionally demanding environment of social work.

Second, this study epitomizes the resource caravan concept nestled within the COR theory. The present findings extend [Grover et al.'s \(2018\)](#) results by providing conceptual clarity to specific job resource in the form of meaningful work. Our findings demonstrate that meaningful work, as a resource by itself, generates other resources. These results enrich the COR theory and specifically spotlighting on the importance of providing social workers with "more, preferably matching, resources that could make emotional job demands less stressful, and even stimulating and challenging" ([De Jonge et al., 2008](#), p. 1461). In the same vein, the mutual generation of resources epitomizes the gain spiral concept postulated by [Fredrickson and Joiner \(2002\)](#). This study also answered to [Fredrickson and Joiner's \(2018\)](#) call to advance understanding of "reciprocal dynamics set in motion by people's day-to-day experiences of positive emotions" (p. 198). The results demonstrate that the corollaries of how experiencing meaningfulness in their work broadens one's behaviour that is beneficial to the workplace. In the process, it builds onto social workers' psychological resources of hope, efficacy, resilience and optimism in managing their job demands better.

Responding to the call by [Bakker and Demerouti \(2017\)](#), this study has extended the understanding of the JD-R theory. As explained earlier, the JD-R theory traditionally focused mainly on the effect of job characteristics on job and personal outcomes ([Bakker and Demerouti, 2017](#)). Recent studies have gravitated toward the role of individual, as one possesses personal resources that bear impact on work outcomes and personal well-being ([Grover et al., 2018](#)). On this note, this study further provides conceptual clarity in demonstrating that PsyCap, as a personal resource, has played a similar role to job resource where it has mitigated against the undesirable effect of job demands.

## Managerial implications

A key managerial implication lies in how PsyCap influences social workers' views of their job demands and may reduce their propensity of experiencing job burnout. Given the growing importance of social workers, it seems reasonable for organizations to introduce interventions that enhance social workers' awareness of the PsyCap dimensions of optimism, hope, resiliency and efficacy. This study has found that efforts to instill meaningfulness into their work had a substantial effect in influencing PsyCap. On this, [Bailey and Madden \(2016\)](#) have highlighted deriving meaning from work can be found in terms of organizational meaningfulness, job meaningfulness, task meaningfulness and interactional meaningfulness.

In line with the above, the following managerial recommendations are proposed. First, organizations should leverage on different medium channels to articulate clearly the broad purpose of the organization and how it intends on making a positive contribution to the society and environment. It is reported that unsatisfied and disengaged employees feel better of their work when they realize and are involved in activities that allow them in giving back to the society ([Seppala, 2016](#)).



In addition, we suggest organizations to initiate job-crafting exercises involving employees taking responsibility and leveraging on the unique knowledge they have of their job to proactively “redefine and reimagine their job designs in a more personally meaningful way” (Berg *et al.*, 2013, p. 81). For instance, social workers can re-craft their job to include providing tuition to children of the clients, or to act as a counselor in providing emotional support to other social workers who are experiencing job burnout. Studies show that job crafting has had a positive influence on job satisfaction and work meaningfulness (Cenciotti *et al.*, 2017; Berg *et al.*, 2013).

Third, a supportive, respectful and inclusive work environment can be created for all social workers. Being an emotionally intense profession, providing an environment of meaningful vertical and lateral interactions allows social workers to provide and to receive feedback, both negative and positive. In turn, this promotes a work environment that supports effective communication on shared values and fosters a sense of belonging and appreciation (Bailey and Madden, 2016).

Finally, the importance of PsyCap demonstrated in this study implies that organizations should ensure social workers having sufficient PsyCap to manage their work demands. In this regard, Luthans *et al.* (2008) developed a web-based intervention program that have been shown to be effective in developing one’s PsyCap. Besides, having on the job training, positive support group, enrichment to job, better quality communication as well as introducing approaches such as improving one’s positive emotions and cognitive ability of social workers to manage work demands have been found to have a positive effect in building PsyCap (Youssef and Luthans, 2012). Beyond social workers, we suggest that organizations should focus on developing leaders’ PsyCap, which have been shown to have a direct influence on followers’ PsyCap (Chen *et al.*, 2017). In sum, with efforts to cultivate and develop both leaders’ and social workers’ PsyCap, it will result in higher quality service to their clients.

### Limitations and future research recommendations

The CMV is one of the limitations in studies using a cross-sectional design. Though procedural and statistical checks were implemented, one cannot preclude the possibility respondents might provide a socially desired response for this study. Future studies should use a longitudinal design to explore the causal effects between the variables. Second, the present findings focused on social workers working in Singapore. Considering the job demands faced by social workers in a developing country likely differ from one faced in a more developed country, future researchers could replicate this study to see if there are any differences across countries of practice. Hence, future researchers could consider using a mixed method approach in future studies. Although a quantitative method was sufficient in meeting the present study’s objectives, meaningful work nonetheless is a complex and perception-based experience. Adopting a mixed method approach would allow deeper insights into the subject matter and advance the body of knowledge. On the same note, studies such as Wright and Hobfoll (2004) have indicated that there could be potential relationships between the categorical variables of gender, age, education and experiences against the outcomes of this study, which future researchers can explore in details.

### References

- Abbas, M., Raja, U., Darr, W. and Bouckennooghe, D. (2014), “Combined effects of perceived politics and psychological capital on job satisfaction, turnover intentions, and performance”, *Journal of Management*, Vol. 40 No. 7, pp. 1813-1830.
- Ahola, K., Toppinen-Tanner, S. and Seppänen, J. (2017), “Interventions to alleviate burnout symptoms and to support return to work among employees with burnout: systematic review and meta-analysis”, *Burnout Research*, Vol. 4, pp. 1-11.

- Alacacioglu, A., Yavuzsen, T., Dirioz, M., Oztop, I. and Yilmaz, U. (2009), "Burnout in nurses and physicians working at an oncology department", *Psycho-Oncology*, Vol. 18 No. 5, pp. 543-548.
- Alarcon, G.M. (2011), "A meta-analysis of burnout with job demands, resources, and attitudes", *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, Vol. 79 No. 2, pp. 549-562.
- Albrecht, S.L. (2013), "Work engagement and the positive power of meaningful work", *Advances in Positive Organizational Psychology*, Emerald Group Publishing, pp. 237-260.
- Allan, B.A., Dexter, C., Kinsey, R. and Parker, S. (2018), "Meaningful work and mental health: job satisfaction as a moderator", *Journal of Mental Health (Abingdon, England)*, Vol. 27 No. 1, pp. 38-44.
- Allan, B.A., Douglass, R.P., Duffy, R.D. and McCarty, R.J. (2016a), "Meaningful work as a moderator of the relation between work stress and meaning in life", *Journal of Career Assessment*, Vol. 24 No. 3, pp. 1-12.
- Allan, B.A., Duffy, R.D. and Collisson, B. (2016b), "Task significance and performance: meaningfulness as a mediator", *Journal of Career Assessment*, Vol. 26 No. 1, pp. 172-182.
- Ang, S.Y. Dhaliwal, S.S. Ayre, T.C. Uthaman, T. Fong, K.Y. Tien, C.E. Zhou, H. and Della, P. (2016), "Demographics and personality factors associated with burnout among nurses in a Singapore tertiary hospital", available at: [www.hindawi.com](http://www.hindawi.com) (accessed 17 September 2018).
- Arens, K.A. and Morin, A.J.S. (2016), "Relations between teachers' emotional exhaustion and students' educational outcomes", *Journal of Educational Psychology*, Vol. 108 No. 6, pp. 800-813.
- Arnold, K.A., Turner, N., Barling, J., Kelloway, E.K. and McKee, M.C. (2007), "Transformational leadership and psychological well-being: the mediating role of meaningful work", *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, Vol. 12 No. 3, pp. 193-203.
- Avey, J.B., Reichard, R.J., Luthans, F. and Mhatre, K.H. (2011), "Meta-analysis of the impact of positive psychological capital on employee attitudes, behaviors, and performance", *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, Vol. 22 No. 2, pp. 127-152.
- Bailey, C. and Madden, A. (2016), "What makes work meaningful – or meaningless", *MIT Sloan Management Review*, Vol. 57 No. 4, pp. 53-61.
- Bakker, A.B. and Demerouti, E. (2007), "The job demands-resources model: state of the art", *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, Vol. 22 No. 3, pp. 309-328.
- Bakker, A.B. and Demerouti, E. (2017), "Job demands – resources theory: taking stock and looking forward", *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, Vol. 22 No. 3, pp. 273-285.
- Bakker, A.B., Demerouti, E. and Euwema, M.C. (2005), "Job resources buffer the impact of job demands on burnout", *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, Vol. 10 No. 2, pp. 170-180.
- Bakker, A.B., Killmer, C.H., Siegrist, J. and Schaufeli, W.B. (2000), "Effort-reward imbalance and burnout among nurses", *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, Vol. 31 No. 4, pp. 884-891.
- Beckett, J.P. (2017), "The changing nature of social work", *International Social Work*, pp. 1-6.
- Berg, J.M., Dutton, J.E. and Wrzesniewski, A. (2013), "Job crafting and meaningful work", in Dik, B.J., Bryne, S.Z. and Steger, M.F. (Eds), *Purpose and Meaning in the Workplace*, APA Books, Washington, DC, WA, pp. 81-104.
- Berkman, P.L. (1971), "Measurement of mental health in a general population survey", *American Journal of Epidemiology*, Vol. 94 No. 2, pp. 105-111.
- Bianchi, R., Schonfeld, I.S. and Laurent, E. (2017), "Burnout: moving beyond the status quo", *International Journal of Stress Management Burnout*, pp. 1-15.
- BLS (2016), "Occupational outlook handbook-social workers", available at: [www.bls.gov](http://www.bls.gov) (accessed 9 July 2018).
- Breninkmeijer, V. and VanYperen, N. (2003), "How to conduct research on burnout: advantages and disadvantages of a unidimensional approach in burnout research", *Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, Vol. 60 No. 90001, pp. i16-i20.
- Buys, C. and Rothmann, S. (2010), "Burnout and engagement of reformed church ministers", *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology*, Vol. 36 No. 1, pp. 1-11.
- Cenciotti, R., Alessandri, G. and Borgogni, L. (2017), "Psychological capital and career success over time: the mediating role of job crafting", *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, Vol. 24 No. 3, pp. 372-384.

- Chang, E., Lee, A., Byeon, E. and Lee, S.M. (2015), "Role of motivation in the relation between perfectionism and academic burnout in Korean students", *Personality and Individual Differences*, Vol. 82, pp. 221-226.
- Chen, Q., Wen, Z., Kong, Y., Niu, J. and Hau, K.T. (2017), "Influence of leaders' psychological capital on their followers: multilevel mediation effect of organizational identification", *Frontiers in Psychology*, Vol. 8, p. 1776.
- Cheung, F., Tang, S.-K. and Tang, S. (2011), "Psychological capital as a moderator between emotional labor, burnout, and job satisfaction among school teachers in China", *International Journal of Stress Management*, Vol. 18 No. 4, pp. 348-371.
- Chiang, C.-F. and Liu, B.-Z. (2017), "Examining job stress and burnout of hotel room attendants: internal marketing and organizational commitment as moderators", *Journal of Human Resources in Hospitality & Tourism*, Vol. 16 No. 4, pp. 367-383.
- Chiller, P. and Crisp, B.R. (2012), "Professional supervision: a workforce retention strategy for social work?", *Australian Social Work*, Vol. 65 No. 2, pp. 232-242.
- Clapper, D.C. and Harris, L.L. (2008), "Reliability and validity of an instrument to describe burnout among collegiate athletic trainers", *Journal of Athletic Training*, Vol. 43 No. 1, pp. 62-69.
- Cohen, J. (1988), *Statistical Power Analysis for the Behavioral Sciences*, 2nd ed., Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, New York, NY.
- Cole, M.S., Walter, F., Bedeian, A.G. and O'Boyle, E.H. (2012), "Job burnout and employee engagement: a meta-analytic examination of construct proliferation", *Journal of Management*, Vol. 38 No. 5, pp. 1550-1581.
- Crawford, E.R., LePine, J.A. and Rich, B.L. (2010), "Linking job demands and resources to employee engagement and burnout: a theoretical extension and meta-analytic test", *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 95 No. 5, pp. 834-848.
- Creed, P.A., Rogers, M.E., Praskova, A. and Searle, J. (2014), "Career calling as a personal resource moderator between environmental demands and burnout in Australian junior doctors", *Journal of Career Development*, Vol. 41 No. 6, pp. 547-561.
- Datu, J.A.D., King, R.B. and Valdez, J.P.M. (2018), "Psychological capital bolsters motivation, engagement, and achievement: cross-sectional and longitudinal studies", *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, Vol. 13 No. 3, pp. 260-270.
- De Jonge, J., Le Blanc, P.M., Peeters, M.C.W. and Noordam, H. (2008), "Emotional job demands and the role of matching job resources: a cross-sectional survey study among health care workers", *International Journal of Nursing Studies*, Vol. 45 No. 10, pp. 1460-1469.
- Dreison, K., Luther, L., Bonfils, K., Sliter, M., McGrew, J. and Salyers, M. (2016), "Job burnout in mental health providers: a meta-analysis of 35 years of intervention", *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, Vol. 23 No. 1, pp. 18-30.
- Fairlie, P. (2011), "Meaningful work, employee engagement, and other key employee outcomes: implications for human resource development", *Advances in Developing Human Resources*, Vol. 13 No. 4, pp. 508-525.
- Fan, W. and Yan, Z. (2010), "Factors affecting response rates of the web survey: a systematic review", *Computers in Human Behavior*, Vol. 26 No. 2, pp. 132-139.
- Finn, A. and Wang, L. (2014), "Formative vs. reflective measures: facets of variation", *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 67 No. 1, pp. 2821-2826.
- Fredrickson, B.L. and Joiner, T. (2002), "Positive emotions trigger upward spirals toward emotional well-being", *Psychological Science*, Vol. 13 No. 2, pp. 172-175.
- Fredrickson, B.L. and Joiner, T. (2018), "Reflections on positive emotions and upward spirals", *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, Vol. 13 No. 2, pp. 194-199.
- Golembiewski, R.T. (1999), "The phase model of burnout: conceptual, theoretical and practical issues", *Journal of Health and Human Services Administration*, Vol. 21 No. 4, pp. 490-501.
- Grover, S.L., Teo, S.T.T., Pick, D., Roche, M. and Newton, C.J. (2018), "Psychological capital as a personal resource in the JD-R model", *Personnel Review*, Vol. 47 No. 4, pp. 968-984.
- Gupta, V. (2014), "Employee creativity: mediating and moderating role of psychological capital", *The Indian Journal of Industrial Relations*, Vol. 49 No. 4, pp. 649-663.

- Gupta, V. and Singh, S. (2014), "Psychological capital as a mediator of the relationship between leadership and creative performance behaviors: empirical evidence from the Indian R&D sector", *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, Vol. 25 No. 10, pp. 1373-1394.
- Hair, J.F., Hult, G.T.M., Ringle, C.M. and Sarstedt, M. (2017), *A Primer on Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM)*, 2nd ed., Sage Publications, London.
- Halbesleben, J.R.B., Neveu, J.P., Paustian-Underdahl, S.C. and Westman, M. (2014), "Getting to the "COR": understanding the role of resources in conservation of resources theory", *Journal of Management*, Vol. 40 No. 5, pp. 1334-1364.
- Hao, S., Hong, W., Xu, H., Zhou, L. and Xie, Z. (2015), "Relationship between resilience, stress and burnout among civil servants in Beijing, China: mediating and moderating effect analysis", *Personality and Individual Differences*, Vol. 83, pp. 65-71.
- Hobfoll, S.E. (2011), "Conservation of resource caravans and engaged settings", *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, Vol. 84 No. 1, pp. 116-122.
- Hobfoll, S.E. (2014), "Resource caravans and resource caravan passageways: a new paradigm for trauma responding", *Intervention*, Vol. 12 No. 1, pp. 21-32.
- Hombrados-Mendieta, I. and Cosano-Rivas, F. (2013), "Burnout, workplace support, job satisfaction and life satisfaction among social workers in Spain: a structural equation model", *International Social Work*, Vol. 56 No. 2, pp. 228-246.
- Hoole, C. and Bonnama, J. (2015), "Work engagement and meaningful work across generational cohorts", *SA Journal of Human Resource Management*, Vol. 13 No. 1, pp. 1-11.
- Hu, J. and Hirsh, J.B. (2017), "Accepting lower salaries for meaningful work", *Frontiers in Psychology*, Vol. 8, pp. 1-10.
- Isaksen, J. (2000), "Constructing meaning despite the drudgery of repetitive work", *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, Vol. 40 No. 3, pp. 84-107.
- Jung, H.S. and Yoon, H.H. (2016), "What does work meaning to hospitality employees? The effects of meaningful work on employees' organizational commitment: the mediating role of job engagement", *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, Vol. 53, pp. 59-68.
- Kahn, W.A. and Fellows, S. (2013), "Employee engagement and meaningful work", in Dik, B.J., Bryne, Z.S. and Steger, M.F. (Eds), *Purpose and Meaning in the Workplace*, APA Books, NJ, NJ, pp. 105-126.
- Kock, N. (2015), "Common method bias in PLS-SEM: a full collinearity assessment approach", *International Journal of e-Collaboration*, Vol. 11 No. 4, pp. 1-10.
- Koesk, G.F. and Koesk, R.D. (1989), "Construct validity of the Maslach Burnout Inventory: a critical review and reconceptualization", *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, Vol. 25 No. 2, pp. 131-132.
- Krasikova, D.V., Lester, P.B. and Harms, P.D. (2015), "Effects of psychological capital on mental health and substance abuse", *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, Vol. 22 No. 3, pp. 280-291.
- Kwok, J.Y. (2017), "Understand social workers' concerns to fix job crunch", available at: [www.todayonline.com](http://www.todayonline.com) (accessed 19 September 2018).
- Li, X.R., Kan, D., Liu, L., Shi, M., Wang, Y., Yang, X., Wang, J., Wang, L. and Wu, H. (2015), "The mediating role of psychological capital on the association between occupational stress and job burnout among bank employees in China", *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, Vol. 12 No. 3, pp. 2984-3001.
- Linkedin (2016), "2016 Global report: purpose at work", available at: <https://business.linkedin.com> (accessed 17 September 2018).
- Lips-Wiersma, M. and Wright, S. (2012), "Measuring the meaning of meaningful work: development and validation of the comprehensive meaningful work scale (CMWS)", *Group & Organization Management*, Vol. 37 No. 5, pp. 655-685.
- Lizano, E.L. (2015), "Examining the impact of job burnout on the health and well-being of human service workers: a systematic review and synthesis", *Human Service Organizations Management, Leadership & Governance*, Vol. 39 No. 3, pp. 167-181.
- Lizano, E.L. and Mor Barak, M. (2015), "Job burnout and affective wellbeing: a longitudinal study of burnout and job satisfaction among public child welfare workers", *Children and Youth Services Review*, Vol. 55, pp. 18-28.

- Luthans, F., Avey, J. and Patera, J. (2008), "Experimental analysis of a web-based training intervention to develop positive psychological capital", *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, Vol. 7 No. 2, p. 209.
- Luthans, F., Avolio, B.J., Avey, J.B. and Norman, S.M. (2007), "Positive psychological capital: measurement and relationship with performance and satisfaction", *Personnel Psychology*, Vol. 60 No. 3, pp. 541-572.
- McFadden, P. (2015), "Measuring burnout among UK social workers: a community care study", available at: [www.qub.ac.uk/](http://www.qub.ac.uk/) (accessed 15 September 2018).
- McFadden, P., Mallett, J. and Leiter, M. (2018), "Extending the two-process model of burnout in child protection workers: the role of resilience in mediating burnout via organizational factors of control, values, fairness, reward, workload, and community relationships", *Stress and Health*, Vol. 34 No. 1, pp. 72-83.
- McKinsey (2014), "The Asian Millennial Workforce and the Travel Industry", available at: [www.visitsingapore.com](http://www.visitsingapore.com) (accessed 15 September 2018).
- Maslach, C. (1993), "Burnout: a multidimensional perspective", in Schaufeli, W.B., Maslach, C. and Marek, T. (Eds), *Professional Burnout: Recent Developments in Theory and Research*, Taylor & Francis, Washington, DC, WA, pp. 19-32.
- Maslach, C. and Jackson, S.E. (1981), "The measurement of experienced burnout", *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, Vol. 2 No. 2, pp. 99-113.
- Maslach, C. and Leiter, M.P. (2016), "Understanding the burnout experience: recent research and its implications for psychiatry", *World Psychiatry*, Vol. 15 No. 2, pp. 103-111.
- Maslach, C., Jackson, S.E. and Leiter, M.P. (1996), *Maslach Burnout Inventory: Manual*, 4th ed., Mind Garden, CA.
- Maslach, C., Schaufeli, W.B. and Leiter, M.P. (2001), "Job burnout", *Annual Review of Psychology*, Vol. 52, pp. 397-422.
- Montani, F., Grégoire, S., Dagenais-Desmarais, V. and Giorgi, G. (2018), "A conservation of resources perspective on negative affect and innovative work behaviour: the role of affect activation and mindfulness", *Journal of Business and Psychology*, Vol. 33 No. 1, pp. 123-139.
- Moyer, F., Aziz, S. and Wuensch, K. (2017), "From workaholism to burnout: psychological capital as a mediator", *International Journal of Workplace Health Management*, Vol. 10 No. 3, pp. 213-227.
- Murray, K. (2015), "Social workers save lives. We are not child-snatchers or do-gooders", available at: [www.theguardian.com](http://www.theguardian.com) (accessed 30 September 2018).
- Murray, S. (2017), "I understand why a lot of people leave\*: being a social worker in Ireland", available at: [www.thejournal.ie](http://www.thejournal.ie) (accessed 9 July 2018).
- Nawrin, R. (2018), "Mediating role of meaningful work between resources and work engagement in Bangladesh's private banks", *Management & Marketing*, Vol. 13 No. 1, pp. 777-795.
- Paek, S., Schuckert, M., Kim, T.T. and Lee, G. (2015), "Why is hospitality employees' psychological capital important? The effects of psychological capital on work engagement and employee morale", *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, Vol. 50, pp. 9-26.
- Park, S., Kim, J., Park, J. and Lim, D.H. (2018), "Work engagement in nonprofit organizations: a conceptual model", *Human Resource Development Review*, Vol. 17 No. 1, pp. 5-33.
- Parker, S.K. (1998), "Enhancing role-breadth self-efficacy: the role of job enrichment and other organizational interventions", *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 83 No. 6, pp. 835-852.
- Peng, J., Jiang, X., Zhang, J., Xiao, R., Song, Y., Feng, X., Zhang, Y. and Miao, D. (2013), "The impact of psychological capital on job burnout of Chinese nurses: the mediator role of organizational commitment", *PLoS One*, Vol. 8 No. 12, pp. 1-7.
- Peterson, S.J., Balthazard, P.A., Waldman, D.A. and Thatcher, R.W. (2008), "Neuroscientific implications of psychological capital: are the brains of optimistic, hopeful, confident, and resilient leaders different?", *Organizational Dynamics*, Vol. 37 No. 4, pp. 342-353.
- Podsakoff, P.M., MacKenzie, S.B., Lee, J.-Y.Y. and Podsakoff, N.P. (2003), "Common method biases in behavioral research: a critical review of the literature and recommended remedies", *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 88 No. 5, pp. 879-903.
- Pratt, M.G., Pradies, C. and Lepisto, D.A. (2013), "Doing well, doing good, and doing with organizational practices for effectively cultivating meaningful work", in Dik, B.J., Bryne, Z.S. and Steger, M.F. (Eds), *Purpose and Meaning in the Workplace*, American Psychological Association, New York, NY, pp. 173-196.



- Ramayah, T., Cheah, J., Chuan, F., Ting, H. and Memon, M.A. (2018), *Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) Using SmartPLS 3.0: An Updated and Practical Guide to Statistical Analysis*, 2nd ed., Pearson, Kuala Lumpur, KL.
- Rani, E.K. (2015), "The role of psychological Capital (PsyCap) in psychological well being of unemployed Indian youth", *Journal of Psychosocial Research*, Vol. 10 No. 1, pp. 149-157.
- Rath, T. and Harter, J. (2010), "The economics of wellbeing", available at: [www.gallup.com](http://www.gallup.com) (accessed 13 September 2018).
- Ringle, C.M., Sarstedt, M., Mitchell, R. and Gudergan, S.P. (2018), "Partial least squares structural equation modeling in HRM research", *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, pp. 1-27.
- Roncalli, S. and Byrne, M. (2016), "Relationships at work, burnout and job satisfaction: a study on Irish psychologists", *Mental Health Review Journal*, Vol. 21 No. 1, pp. 23-36.
- Rosso, B.D., Dekas, K.H. and Wrzesniewski, A. (2010), "On the meaning of work: a theoretical integration and review", *Research in Organizational Behavior*, Vol. 30, pp. 91-127.
- Sánchez-Fernández, J., Muñoz-Leiva, F. and Montoro-Ríos, F.J. (2012), "Improving retention rate and response quality in web-based surveys", *Computers in Human Behavior*, Vol. 28 No. 2, pp. 507-514.
- Sarstedt, M., Ringle, C.M., Smith, D., Reams, R. and Hair, J.F. (2014), "Partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM): a useful tool for family business researchers", *Journal of Family Business Strategy*, Vol. 5 No. 1, pp. 105-115.
- Scheier, M.F. and Carver, C.S. (1985), "Optimism, coping, and health: assessment and implications of generalized outcome expectancies", *Health Psychology*, Vol. 4 No. 3, pp. 219-247.
- Seppala, E. (2016), "To motivate employees, do 3 things well", available at: <https://hbr.org> (accessed 17 March 2019).
- Sharma, M., Atri, A. and Branscum, P. (2013), *Foundations of Mental Health Promotion*, Jones and Bartlett, Sudbury, MA.
- Siu, O., Bakker, A.B. and Jiang, X. (2014), "Psychological capital among university students: relationships with study engagement and intrinsic motivation", *Journal of Happiness Studies*, Vol. 15 No. 4, pp. 979-994.
- Snyder, C.R. (2002), "Hope theory: rainbows in the mind", *Psychological Inquiry*, Vol. 13 No. 4, pp. 249-275.
- Srivastava, U.R. and Maurya, V. (2017), "Organizational and individual level antecedents of psychological Capital and its associated outcomes: development of a conceptual framework", *Management and Labour Studies*, Vol. 42 No. 3, pp. 205-236.
- Steger, M.F. (2017), "Creating meaning and purpose at work", in Oades, L.G., Steger, M.F., Fave, A.D. and Passmore, J. (Eds), *The Wiley Blackwell Handbook of the Psychology of Positivity and Strengths-Based Approaches at Work*, John Wiley & Sons, New York, NY, pp. 60-80.
- Steger, M.F. and Dik, B.J. (2010), "Work as meaning: individual and organizational benefits of engaging in meaningful work", in Linley, A.P., Harrington, S. and Garcea, N. (Eds), *Oxford Handbook of Positive Psychology and Work*, Oxford University Press, New York, NY, pp. 131-142.
- Steger, M.F., Dik, B.J. and Duffy, R.D. (2012), "Measuring meaningful work: the work and meaning inventory (WAMI)", *Journal of Career Assessment*, Vol. 20 No. 3, pp. 322-337.
- Steger, M.F., Littman-Ovadia, H., Miller, M., Menger, L. and Rothmann, S. (2013), "Engaging in work even when it is meaningless: positive affective disposition and meaningful work interact in relation to work engagement", *Journal of Career Assessment*, Vol. 21 No. 2, pp. 348-361.
- Tai, J. (2017), "Expanding social service sector a bright spot for jobs", available at: [www.straitstimes.com](http://www.straitstimes.com) (accessed 19 September 2018).
- The Chronicle Herald (2017), "N.S. social workers suffering burnout, NDP says", available at: <http://thechronicleherald.ca> (accessed 9 July 2018).
- Tong, L. (2018), "Relationship between meaningful work and job performance in nurses", *International Journal of Nursing Practice*, Vol. 24 No. 2, pp. 1-6.
- Torpey, E. (2018), "Careers in social work: outlook, pay, and more", available at: [www.bls.gov](http://www.bls.gov) (accessed 5 Sep 2018).

Travis, D.J., Lizano, E.L. and Mor Barak, M.E. (2016), "I'm so stressed!" A longitudinal model of stress, burnout and engagement among social workers in child welfare settings", *British Journal of Social Work*, Vol. 46 No. 4, pp. 1076-1095.

Truell, R. (2018), "Social work is booming worldwide – because it's proven to work", available at: [www.theguardian.com](http://www.theguardian.com) (accessed 15 September 2018).

Tüzün, I.K., Çetin, F. and Basim, H.N. (2018), "Improving job performance through identification and psychological capital", *International Journal of Productivity and Performance Management*, Vol. 67 No. 1, pp. 155-170.

Van Dierendonck, D., Schaufeli, W.B. and Buunk, B.P. (2001), "Toward a process model of burnout: results from a secondary analysis", *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, Vol. 10 No. 1, pp. 41-52.

Vanno, V., Kaemkate, W. and Wongwanich, S. (2015), "Effect of group-level positive psychological Capital on group effectiveness of Thai students", *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, Vol. 171, pp. 1309-1314.

Vidman, Å. and Strömberg, A. (2018), "Well it is for their sake we are here": meaningful work tasks from care workers' view", *Working with Older People (Brighton, England)*, Vol. 22 No. 2, pp. 111-120.

Vidwans, S.S. and Raghvendra, P. (2016), "A study of meaningful work, hope and meaning in life in young professional artists", *Indian Journal of Positive Psychology*, Vol. 7 No. 4, pp. 469-471.

Wagnild, G.M. and Young, H.M. (1993), "Development and psychometric evaluation of the resilience scale", *Journal of Nursing Measurement*, Vol. 1 No. 2, pp. 165-178.

Welander, J., Astvik, W. and Isaksson, K. (2016), "Corrosion of trust: violation of psychological contracts as a reason for turnover amongst social workers", *Nordic Social Work Research*, Vol. 7 No. 1, pp. 67-79.

Wright, T.A. and Hobfoll, S.E. (2004), "Commitment, psychological well-being and job performance: an examination of conservation of resources (COR) theory and job burnout", *Journal of Business and Management*, Vol. 9 No. 4, pp. 389-406.

Youssef, C.M. and Luthans, F. (2012), "Psychological capital: meaning, findings and future directions", in Spreitzer, G.M. and Cameron, K.S. (Eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Positive Organizational Scholarship*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp. 1-20.

## Further reading

Salamon, L.M. Sokolowski, W.S. Haddock, M.A. and Tice, H.S. (2013), "The state of global civil society and volunteering: latest findings from implementation of the UN nonprofit handbook", available at: <http://ccss.jhu.edu> (accessed 18 September 2018).

## Corresponding author

Kim-Lim Tan can be contacted at: [tan.kim.lim@postgrad.curtin.edu.my](mailto:tan.kim.lim@postgrad.curtin.edu.my)

---

For instructions on how to order reprints of this article, please visit our website:  
[www.emeraldgroupublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm](http://www.emeraldgroupublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm)  
Or contact us for further details: [permissions@emeraldinsight.com](mailto:permissions@emeraldinsight.com)