



Research Article

Internal structure of an alternative measure of burnout: Study on the Slovenian adaptation of the Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (OLBI)



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ABSTRACT

This study evaluates the factorial validity and reliability of the Slovenian adaptation of the Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (OLBI) in a sample of 1436 Slovenian employees of various occupations. Confirmatory factor analyses were used to evaluate alternative structural models of OLBI, and reliability of variant scales was estimated. The results reveal a different structure of the Slovenian adaptation compared with the original one and a very notable difference in reliability between positively and negatively framed items. The results could be explained with a response bias or the specific nature of burnout and work engagement that OLBI promises to assess simultaneously. Therefore, we believe that the internal structure of the original inventory needs to be reconsidered.

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1. Introduction

Over the last decades occupational burnout gained an increased attention among professionals and researchers (for a review see Halbesleben & Buckley, 2004) due to its negative impact on employees' health, negative job attitudes and impaired organizational behavior (i.e., absenteeism, job turnover, presenteeism) (for a review see Schaufeli, 2003).

The most commonly-used definition of psychological burnout arises from Maslach and Jackson (1981), where burnout is defined as a syndrome consisting of three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment. Exhaustion occurs as a result of one's emotional demands. Depersonalization refers to a cynical, negative or detached response to care recipients/patients. Reduced personal accomplishment refers to a belief that one can no longer work effectively with clients/patients/care recipients. Following this conception authors developed the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI, Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996), which is currently the most widely used research instrument for burnout assessment.

Originally, the measure has been developed exclusively for use in human services professions (MBI-HSS). A second version of the MBI was developed for use in educational settings (MBI-ES). Due to increasing interest in burnout within occupations without a significant human service component, a third, general version of the MBI was developed (MBI-GS). There are several studies supporting the use of MBI for the assessment of burnout and its factorial validity across different occupations, languages and versions of MBI (for a recent meta-analysis of validation studies, see Worley, Vassar, Wheeler, & Barnes, 2008).

However, the construct's definition and measurement with MBI has drawn several criticisms. Some researchers (e.g. Kalliath, 2000) suggested that only the first two dimensions of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization should be included into the burnout model. Partly because the third dimension of personal accomplishment shows far less consistent relationships to some organizational outcomes (e.g. job satisfaction and organizational commitment; Lee & Ashforth, 1996) and probably could be more appropriately conceptualized as a personality trait similar to self-efficacy (e.g. Cordes & Dougherty, 1993). Furthermore, Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, and Schaufeli (2001) pointed out that one-sided scales are inferior to scales that include mixed (both positively and negatively worded) items, because they can lead to artificial factor solutions in which positively and negatively worded items are likely to cluster.

To overcome these criticisms new inventories have been developed for the evaluation of the syndrome. One of the often used alternative burnout instruments, the Oldenburg Burnout Inventory

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(OLBI; Demerouti, Bakker, Vardakou, & Kantas, 2003), claims to solve both above-mentioned problems that are inherent to the MBI. It is based on a model similar to that of MBI, but employs only two dimensions (exhaustion and disengagement from work). Furthermore, both scales consist of mixed instead of only negative items, to mitigate the potential wording biases of the MBI. Contrary to the MBI that includes only the affective aspects of exhaustion, the OLBI also includes cognitive and physical aspects. According to authors this facilitates the application of OLBI to the workers that perform physical work or work with data. What is more, the disengagement dimension of OLBI refers to distancing oneself from one's work in general, thus exhibiting a cynical, negative attitude toward it, rather than only distancing oneself from people involved in work (e.g. coworkers, patients, clients), which is the case in the original MBI. Authors therefore argue that OLBI might be more generally applicable as compared to MBI, despite the fact that both instruments are suitable for any occupational group.

So far, several studies have confirmed factorial validity of the OLBI in different countries: Germany (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Ebbinghaus, 2002), the United States (Halbesleben & Demerouti, 2005), and Greece (Demerouti et al., 2003). The proposed two factor model demonstrated a relatively better fit to the data compared to alternative factor structures (unidimensional model, positive/negative wording model) in several occupational groups (human service, industrial, and transportation jobs).

On the other hand, some studies highlight potential limitations of the OLBI. For instance, Halbesleben (2003) noted that the fit statistics of two-factor models, obtained in his study, have been rather lower than regularly accepted levels. Although there was relatively more support for the two-factor structure (as compared to a unidimensional), the evidence for the construct validity of the OLBI was tentative only, due to the relatively poor fit of the tested models. The fit indices of the tested models were lower than regularly accepted levels proposed by Hu and Bentler (1999); e.g. RMSEA (<0.06); CFI (>0.95); TLI (>0.95) in other validation studies as well (e.g. Demerouti et al., 2003). What is more, studies in the United States (Halbesleben & Demerouti, 2005) and Greece (Demerouti et al., 2003), which have confirmed the convergent validity of the OLBI and MBI-GS, demonstrated that test-retest reliability of the OLBI dimensions for the time of 4 months was low (Halbesleben & Demerouti, 2005; $r_{\text{exhaustion}} = 0.51$, $r_{\text{disengagement}} = 0.34$).

In addition to that, the use of reversed items in measurement scales remains a controversial topic. Some authors, including Demerouti et al. (2003) recommend their use to reduce the potential effects of response pattern biases, while others advise against it, because the positive vs. negative framing of the items may act as a method factor obscuring the item structure of the measured trait (e.g. Weijters, Baumgartner, & Schillewaert, 2013). According to Weijters et al. (2013), there are three distinct mechanisms that could lead to method effects in response to reversed items: (a) acquiescence (preference for the positive or negative side of the rating scale), (b) careless responding (response that is not based on the content) and (c) confirmation bias (activation of beliefs that are consistent with the way in which the first item is stated). First two mechanisms encourage response inconsistencies between regular and reverse items, thus leading to correlated errors or the emergence of spurious factors. This is also in line with the notion of Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, and Podsakoff (2003) that including reverse-coded items may produce artifactual response factors consisting exclusively of reverse-coded items. The third mechanism can lead to an upward or downward bias in respondent's scores, depending on the keying direction of the first item measuring focal construct. The method effects generated by these mechanisms may as well be present when all items are worded in the same direction, but are completely confounded with content variance and therefore undetectable, unless directly measured (Podsakoff

et al., 2003). Moreover, researchers have pointed out some other drawbacks of this approach. Including negatively and positively framed items may lead to interpretational problems, because positive and negative affective states have been shown to have different antecedents (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001). Also, research on the structure of affect (Lloret & González-Romá, 2003) has demonstrated that low scores in positive items do not parallel high scores on negative items and vice versa (low scores on negative items do not parallel high scores on positive ones).

In light of the ambiguous findings regarding the factorial validity and item wording, we claim that is relevant to re-examine the psychometric properties of OLBI in an additional sample. Therefore, the aim of the presented study was to analyze the factorial structure and scale reliability of the Slovenian adaptation of OLBI. More particularly, we will compare the two-factor burnout model, consisting of two components of burnout (exhaustion and disengagement), with alternative structure models (unidimensional model, two-factor wording model (positive-negative wording), four factor model).

2. Method

2.1. Participants

The present study is based on two samples. As sample 2 is not very representative of the Slovenian workforce (i.e., lower educated and younger employees), another data collection method was simultaneously applied in order to secure greater heterogeneity and, in turn, generalizability of the findings. Based on a review by Wheeler, Shanine, Leon, and Whitman (2014) comparing student-recruited samples and organization-based samples, we also do not expect meaningful differences in the results obtained by the two samples.

Sample 1 was a student-recruited sample consisted of 1063 employees (58% female, 42% male), The most prevalent age group was 40–50 years (34%), 9% were younger than 20 years, 20% were aged between 20 and 30 years, 26% were aged between 30 and 40 and 10% were more than 50 years old. The educational structure was as follows: 30% obtained a university degree or higher, 21% completed a higher vocational school, 27% finished high school, others (22%) obtained a lower vocational education or basic (elementary) education. Approximately three quarters of the participants worked full-time (68%) and had a permanent long-term job contract (78%). Sample 2 was a heterogeneous sample obtained through five different organizations in health care, construction, and industrial work. Of the 373 employees, 48% were female and 52% were male. Twelve percent of the participants were younger than 20 years, 30% were aged between 20 and 30 years, 34% were aged between 30 and 40, others were aged 40 and 50 years. Twenty-three percent of this sample obtained a university degree or higher, 11% completed a higher vocational school, 31% finished high school, while others (31%) obtained a lower vocational education or basic (elementary) education. The vast majority of the employees worked full-time (98%) and had a long-term contract (92%).

The total sample consisted of 1436 Slovenian employees of various occupations, 749 of which were female and 687 were male. Eight percent of the participants were less than 20 years old, 24% were from 20 to 30 years old, 27% were from 30 to 40 years old, 33% were from 40 to 50 years old and 8% were more than 50 years old. Most of the participants completed either high school (28%), university (23%), higher vocational (19%) or vocational school (18%). The majority of participants worked with information (39%), 31% worked primarily with people and 28% worked primarily with things according to Things-Data-People taxonomy

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