



Relationship between resilience, stress and burnout among civil servants in Beijing, China: Mediating and moderating effect analysis



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 23 September 2014
Received in revised form 17 March 2015
Accepted 27 March 2015
Available online 9 April 2015

Keywords:

Resilience
Stress
Burnout
Mediating effect
Moderating effect
Civil servants
Structural equation modeling

ABSTRACT

This study aimed to explore the mediating and moderating effect in the relationship between resilience, stress and burnout among civil servants of Beijing, China. A cross-sectional study was conducted among civil servants in Beijing. Totally 541 civil servants completed a self-report questionnaire including three scales measuring civil servants' resilience, stress and burnout. The data were analyzed with correlation, multiple regression and structural equation modeling. The results revealed that work stress rather than life and health stress could significantly predict burnout. Resilience played a partial mediating role between work stress and burnout, that is, work stress had both a direct and an indirect, via resilience, impact on burnout. Work stress played a partial mediating role between resilience and burnout, thus, resilience could prevent the development of burnout by relieving work stress, in addition to directly relieving it. Moreover, resilience was a moderator between work stress and burnout, and it could serve as a buffer to mitigate the adverse effects of work stress. These results suggest that resilience could be a positive personality trait for alleviating or eliminating work stress and combating burnout of civil servants of Beijing.

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1. Introduction

Civil servants who perform the function for the management of the state and government are a relatively special occupational group in China. With the development of the society and the deepening of the reform, the government's management of civil servants has become more and more standard, more and more stringent. As a result, many civil servants feel "stressed out".

Abbreviations: RTSCA-R, Resilient Trait Scale for Chinese Adults-Revised; OP, optimism; AC, acceptance; CA, controllability; SU, supportiveness; CSSS, Civil Servants Stress Scale; MD, management and development; LR, life relationships; WR, working relationships; HR, health and responsibility; ES, economic stress; WL, working load; WS, work stress; LHS, life and health stress; ES1, two items related to work stress from economic stress dimension; MBI-GS, Maslach Burnout Inventory-General Survey; EE, emotional exhaustion; CY, cynicism; PE, professional efficacy; RWS, resilience and work stress interaction term; CA*MD, controllability and management and development product term; OP*WR, optimism and work relationships product term; AC*WL, acceptance and working load product term; SU*ES1, supportiveness and ES1 product term.

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As is well known, stress is an important negative predictor of human health, and could result in some stress-related illnesses, such as burnout (Boyas & Wind, 2010; Hsu, Chen, Yu, & Lou, 2010). Burnout is an important phenomenon that derives from chronic emotional responses and interpersonal stressors that occur at work, and burnout syndrome is determined by the dimensions of emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and reduced professional efficacy (Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001).

Although burnout has increased over the last decade, not everyone at the same workplace develops burnout, even facing the similar work stress. It suggested that individual factors may contribute to this phenomenon. In line with the transactional model of stress and coping theory, it indicated that some people are more vulnerable to stressful situations than others, especially those with high depressive symptoms, or have certain personality traits, such as high neuroticism or low optimism (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). That is to say, contrary personality traits, such as low neuroticism or high optimism, are just the reverse. Consequently, not everyone perceives some life situations as stressful and the causes related to the individual variables may be the personality traits, for example, resilience as a personality trait may follow the same law.

Resilience is an interactive phenomenon that is inferred from findings indicating that some individuals have a relatively good outcome despite having experienced serious stresses or adversities –

their outcome being better than that of other individuals who suffered the same experiences (Rutter, 2013). Although there is still considerable debate regarding definitions of resilience, trait orientation suggests that resilience is a personality trait that helps individuals cope with adversity and achieve good adjustment and development (Hu, Zhang, & Wang, 2015).

Consistent with the transactional model, resilience as a personality trait has been suggested to play an important role in the relationship between work stress and burnout. Several studies on nurses (García & Calvo, 2012; Mealer et al., 2012) and doctors (Taku, 2014) found resilience was a protective factor that can buffer the relationship between risk factors and burnout. Furthermore, the mediating effect of resilience on life events/learning stress and learning burnout of students (Wang & Zhang, 2011; Zhang, 2013) and the moderating effect of resilience on role stress and job burnout of teachers (Xu, Zhang, Sun, & Tian, 2013) have been proved.

For civil servants, burnout threatens not only their own health, but also the government's work efficiency and social stability. Therefore, it should be given more attention. Nonetheless, the mediating and moderating effect of resilience on stress and burnout among civil servants, especially, the mediating effect of stress on resilience and burnout has not been previously explored. According to the previous studies, we hypothesized that (1) the relationship between stress and burnout is mediated by resilience, and that (2) the relationship between resilience and burnout is mediated by stress, and that (3) resilience moderates the relationship between stress and burnout among civil servants in Beijing, China. Figure 1 depicts the hypothesized conceptual model of this study.

2. Methods

2.1. Participants and procedure

A cross-sectional study with a representative sample consisting of 600 civil servants in Beijing, China, were carried out from April 2013 to June 2014. This study was approved by the Biomedical Ethics Committee of Peking University.

We contacted the administrators of the departments affiliated to Beijing municipal government, and they assisted us in recruiting the civil servants who had agreed to participate. Participants were invited to complete a self-report questionnaire on resilience, stress, and burnout, and completed the questionnaire in a meeting room environment in their own departments. The questionnaire was anonymous, and the purpose of the research was explained to the respondents. Additionally, their confidentiality was assured, and they were informed that they had the right to drop out whenever they wanted. 541 civil servants completed the questionnaire, the other 59 civil servants were excluded due to missing values in

the relevant items in the questionnaire. The effective response rate was 90.17%.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Resilient Trait Scale for Chinese Adults-Revised (RTSCA-R)

RTSCA-R (Hao, 2014; Hao & Hong, 2014) consists of 29 items and four dimensions: optimism (OP), acceptance (AC), controllability (CA) and supportiveness (SU). Items are assessed on a 4-point scale that ranges from “not true at all” (scored 1) to “true nearly all the time” (scored 4). Seven items are reverse-scored to reduce acquiescence biases. Higher scores on the scale reflect greater resilience. The reliability and validity of RTSCA-R were satisfied in Chinese civil servants. In the present study, Cronbach's α coefficient for the total scale was 0.93. Cronbach's α coefficients of OP, AC, CA and SU ranged from 0.75 to 0.90.

2.2.2. Civil Servants Stress Scale (CSSS)

CSSS (Hao, 2014; Hao, Xu, Zhou, Xie, & Hong, 2014) which is designed to assess the perceived stress of Chinese civil servants consists of 38 items and six dimensions: management and development (MD), life relationships (LR), working relationships (WR), health and responsibility (HR), economic stress (ES) and working load (WL). Additionally, the CSSS can be divided into two subscales (Hao, 2014): work stress (WS) subscale and life and health stress (LHS) subscale. Work stress subscale consists of 23 items including MD, WR, WL and two items of ES, and life and health stress subscale consists of 15 items including LR, HR, and three items of ES. Each item is using an 11-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (no pressure) to 10 (maximum pressure). Higher scores on CSSS indicate higher levels of stress of civil servants. In this study, Cronbach's α coefficient for the total scale was 0.95. Cronbach's α coefficients of the six dimensions ranged from 0.80 to 0.94, and Cronbach's α coefficients of work stress subscale and life and health stress subscale were 0.95 and 0.91, respectively.

2.2.3. Maslach Burnout Inventory-General Survey (MBI-GS)

The Chinese version of MBI-GS (Li & Shi, 2003) consists of 15 items, using a seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from 0 (never) to 6 (every day). The 15-items scale has three subscales including emotional exhaustion (EE), cynicism (CY), and professional efficacy (PE), which reflect different aspects of the burnout syndromes. Higher scores on EE and CY subscales and lower scores on PE

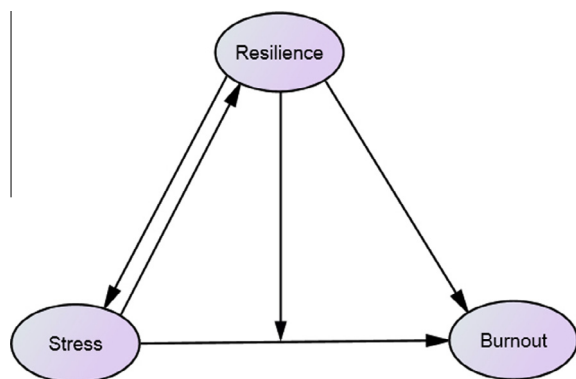


Fig. 1. Mediation and moderation model of resilience, stress and burnout.

Table 1

Frequency distribution of civil servants' demographical characteristics (N = 541).

Variables	Groups	n	%
Gender	Male	274	50.6
	Female	263	48.6
	Missing value	4	0.7
Age	≤29	80	14.8
	30–39	264	48.8
	40–49	139	25.7
	≥50	51	9.4
	Missing value	7	1.3
Marital status	Single	84	15.5
	Married	457	84.5
Education	Junior college or under	35	6.5
	Undergraduate	411	76.0
	Graduate	91	16.8
	Missing value	4	0.7
Administrative level	Level 7	17	3.1
	Level 8	23	4.3
	Level 9	154	28.5
	Level 10	163	30.1
	Level 11	162	29.9
	Level 12	14	2.6
	Missing value	8	1.5

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