IMPACTS OF OPTIMISM AND JOB CHARACTERISTICS ON JOB BURNOUT AMONG THE MILLENNIAL GENERATION: EVIDENCE FROM A SURVEY OF COMMUNITY SERVICE WORKERS IN SHAANXI, CHINA

Xiaorong JIANG, Hui YANG

Impacts of Optimism and Job Characteristics on Job Burnout among the Millennial Generation: Evidence from a Survey of Community Service Workers in Shaanxi, China

Xiaorong JIANG[1], Hui YANG[2]

Abstract

Currently, the Millennial Generation has become the backbone of the employee population in China. However, changes in society and culture, as well as the unique social values and personality traits of the Millennial Generation, have caused job burnout in the workplace. Since the problem of job burnout in the Millennial Generation has become increasingly prominent, there has been extensive attention from academia and industries. In this study, the hierarchical regression and dominance analysis on the survey data from a questionnaire for community service workers in Shaanxi Province of China in 2015 were conducted to explore the influence mechanism of optimism and job characteristics on job burnout in the Millennial Generation. Results show that optimism and job characteristics affect the degree of job burnout of individuals of the Millennial Generation. Trait optimism and leadership support have significant negative impacts on job burnout, while work overload has a significantly positive impact on job burnout among the individuals of the Millennial Generation; role ambiguity, co-worker support, and job autonomy have significant influence on emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and diminished personal accomplishment of job burnout among the individuals of the Millennial Generation. In addition, predictive capacity of job characteristics on job burnout varies among individuals of the Millennial Generation. The conclusions provide important references for improving the mental health management of individuals, the counseling of group psychological problems, and organizational performance.

Keywords: individuals of the Millennial Generation, job burnout, optimism, job characteristics, community service.

[1] Xi'an University of Technology, School of Economics and Management, Xi'an, CHINA. E-mail: jiangxiaorong99@163.com (*Corresponding Author)

[2] Xi'an University of Technology School of Economics and Management, Xi'an, CHINA. E-mail: xifanhui@126.com

Introduction

Since the implementation of the Reform and Opening up policy, China has made remarkable economic achievements. On the one hand, the rapid development of the economy and technology brings material prosperity, comfort, and convenience; on the other hand, these rapid changes also bring uncertainty and direct pressure for individuals. In addition, rapid changes of the environment increase the amount and intensity of requirements for enterprises and organizations. Compatibility between the management features of enterprises and organizations and the psychological characteristics of individuals, as well as individuals' proper handling of good work-life balance under the rapid development of the society, highlights the indirect pressure of individuals due to environmental changes. Prolonged accumulation of pressure in a large quantity evolves into job burnout. According to the Chinese Job Burnout Index Survey in 2014, 70% of respondents had mild job burnout, and 13% of respondents had severe job burnout (i.e., one out of eight respondents showed severe job burnout (Chinese Job burnout Index Survey, 2014). Hence, the current condition of job burnout of the Chinese employee population is not optimistic.

Among the employee population in China, the Millennial Generation is a special group who grew up in the era of economic boom and has become the backbone of China's employee population. The Millennial Generation has different social values and personality traits from the previous generation. Due to the great differences in management between generations, many unprecedented management problems and conflicts have emerged. In addition to the dual pressures of work and life faced by specific age groups, the job burnout is particularly prominent in the Millennial Generation. Especially in recent years, many young employees from FOXCONN have committed suicide, jumping from high-rise buildings in Shenzhen, Zhengzhou, and Kunshan, China. Job burnout of the Millennial Generation has aroused academic and public concerns. Existing reports of the Millennial Generation are limited to the differences in intergenerational values (You, Sun & Lei, 2013) and the correlation between the individuals' values and personality traits and their dedication to their work and performance (Hou, Li & Tu, 2014; Zhang, David & Li, 2013; Pan, 2012; Ma, Huang & Zhu, 2014). Rarely is there an empirical study of the job burnout of the Millennial Generation and its influencing factors.

On the other hand, job burnout is a more severe stress derived from prolonged accumulation of pressure. Existing reports in job burnout are based on the survey data from Western populations to reveal job burnout based on certain personality traits of individuals or to investigate different influencing factors and possible outcomes of job burnout regarding the characteristics of the job or the workplace.

Bakker, Demerouti & Sanz-Vergel (2014) indicated that job burnout would trigger a series of health problems. Since job burnout is related to psychological aspects of individuals, which are greatly affected by cultural traditions of society and the ethnic personalities of the individuals, it is unclear if the findings of job burnout in Western populations can reflect the situation of the individuals of the Millennial Generation in China. Hence, further verification is necessary. Existing Chinese literatures are mostly follow-ups and validation studies that are based on the job burnout of a particular industry. For example, Sun & Guo (2011) studied the effect of job position characteristics and related factors on job burnout of counselors. Li & Zhou (2013) studied the correlations of psychological capital with emotional labor strategies and job burnout. Cao, Peng & Liang (2013) also conducted a follow-up and forecasting research on job engagement and job burnout. However, perspective studies of the effects of optimism and job characteristics on job burnout have been rarely reported. In fact, research on positive organizational behavior indicated that optimism has a significant and positive impact on work-related outcomes and a significant impact on individuals who are facing role stress. To study the job burnout from the angle of optimism, many aspects that have been ignored in the existing reports can be included. The concept of job characteristics plays an important role in management and social psychology research, which includes job burnout. Appropriate and reasonable job characteristics can effectively eliminate the job burnout of the Millennial Generation to a certain extent and have a positive impact on occupational health among the Millennial Generation (Warr, 1987).

Based on the above literature, this study uses the survey data of community service workers in Shaanxi, China, to conduct empirical analysis to reveal the relationships between optimism and job characteristics and job burnout. Relevant conclusions of this study can help in understanding the roles of individuals of the Millennial Generation regarding the development of community service and provide a reference on how endogenous strength changed the present situation of community service in China.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. Section 2 describes the literature review and research hypothesis. Section 3 introduces data, variables, and methods. Section 4 explores the relationship between optimism, job characteristics, and job burnout of the Millennial Generation using hierarchical regression analysis and dominance analysis.Section 5 mainly discusses the results. And conclusions are summarized in section 6.

Literature Review and Research Hypothesis

The Millennial Generation and Job burnout

China's labor market has made significant changes since the turn of 21st century, and the Millennial Generation has become the backbone of the employee population in China. In this study, the Millennial Generation refers to individuals who were born in the 1980s (Li, 2015). Compared to the employees of the previous generation, the Millennial Generation has distinct characteristics. They have lived through the unique one-child policy, resulting in being the favorite child of their families. The Millennial Generation was born and raised in the time since the reform and opening-up policy, when China experienced an economic boom and rapid development. This Millennial Generation also experienced great conflicts and integration of Eastern and Western cultures due to economic globalization and rapid development of internet technology (Tapscott, 1998). In addition, the Millennial Generation has high educational backgrounds that coincide with the reformation of higher education in China (Lyons, 2004). Employees of the Millennial Generation, having grown up in such an environment, have unique social values and distinctive personality traits, focusing on work-life balance, life quality, and enjoyment of life. This generation has a strong sense of innovation but low job satisfaction and employee loyalty (Shri, 2011; Meister & Willyerd, 2010). It also has a strong desire of short-term returns but a lack of patience and dislikes following rules and regulations at work (Twenge, Campbell, Hoffman & Lance, 2010). The Millennial Generation has computer and technical expertise but, there is a lack of communication and listening skills (Wey Smola & Sutton, 2002). Currently, the administrators of organizations and enterprises are usually part of the population born before the implementation of the reform and opening-up policy. The great differences between management and the Millennial Generation have led to unprecedented management problems and conflicts (Shri, 2011), such as frequent job-hopping and deviant behaviors at work (Ilies, Johnson, Judge & Keeney, 2011). On the other hand, due to the traditional culture of China, each individual of the Millennial Generation will have to earn a living for his or her parents, parents-in-law, and one to two children as dependents, after getting married. In addition, in order to response to the environmental changes, organizations and enterprises constantly place higher requirements to the Millennial Generation. Moreover, rapid development of economic and technological development brought uncertainty to the career and financial statuses of the Millennial Generation, forcing them to learn new skills continuously. Hence, the Millennial Generation is subjected to a greater degree of job burnout compared to other generations. Results of our survey also validated the previous findings as described above.

The term Ź „job burnout" first appeared in the field of psychology. U.S. Clinical psychologist, Freudenberger (1974), observed that people who engaged in medical practice have continued depletion of energy and enthusiasm, becoming less caring about others's feelings and details of work. This phenomenon is known as burnout. After the proposal of this concept, it immediately aroused attention from academia and the public, and it was widely extended to fields such as sociology and management. After many years of research, Maslach (2001) ultimately defined job burnout as the inability to effectively and positively deal with different pressures at work. Individuals of the Millennial Generation are pre-occupied with emotions and interpersonal relations at work, thereby resulting in a chronic accumulation of psychological reactions. Maslach classified job burnout into three dimensions, including emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and diminished personal accomplishment. Emotion exhaustion is the core feature of job burnout that mainly exhibits as physical and mental exhaustion. Depersonalization can only be perceived by others through specific behaviors, including the repelling of work and refusing to work or communicate at work. diminished personal accomplishment refers to the individuals who cannot be satisfied and feel achievement in their careers. The classification of these three dimensions of job burnout has been widely accepted by many researchers.

According to social cycle theory, and from a medical point of view, job burnout is a negative emotional state caused by cyclical pressure. Individuals with job burnout have a series of physical and mental health problems. Peterson *et al.* (2008) showed that an individual is vulnerable to exhaustion, irritability, depression, neck pain, memory loss, and decreased sleep quality in the early stage of job burnout. Ahola (2007) believed that job burnout is a risk factor for inducing cardiovascular disease. Some scholars indicated a correlation between job burnout and depression. Once an individual experiences a high degree of job burnout, he or she will experience psychological difficulties (Hakanen & Schaufeli, 2012; Ahola, Hakanen, Perhoniemi & Mutanen, 2014).

Scholars broadly define the antecedents of job burnout into four categories: individual characteristics, job characteristics, professional characteristics, and organizational features. For example, Hall & Savery (1987) showed a significant correlation between lacking job autonomy and feeling pressure at work in some individuals. Hillhouse, Adler & Walters (2000) demonstrated that job burnout was positively related to emotional disorders and poor health. Swider & Zimmerman (2010) used element analysis for identifying the multiple correlations between the three dimensions of job burnout. They also showed that individual factors (e.g., neuroticism and perfectionism) played an important role in the development of job burnout. Hence, different characteristics and abilities of individuals as well as their differences in work demands and attitudes toward the accessible resources at work determined the development of job burnout. Bakker *et al.* (2014) summarized the causes of job burnout into two categories: situational

factors and individual factors. Situational factors included job demands and resources, and individual factors referred to financial situation and the personality of an individual.

In addition, scholars have conducted studies on job burnout in different countries and industries and achieved certain results. Rath, Huffman, Phillips, Carpenter & Fowler (2015) showed that job burnout of gynecological oncologists was associated with their work-related stress and low job satisfaction. Moreover, young female clinicians were more likely to feel exhausted at work. Goddard, Hoy & Hoy (2000) believed that a teacher community with an adequate spirit of collectivism made it easier for teachers to access collective support from peers, including spiritual support and assistance in educational skills, which had a direct, positive effect on reducing the sense of helplessness in the profession. Karatepe & Aleshinloy (2009) studied the job burnout of frontline hotel employees in Nigeria and showed that some negative emotions would intensify the emotional disorders of the employees, while intrinsic task motivation could reduce the emotional disorders. Wong & Wang (2009) conducted a survey analysis of tour guides in Taiwan and demonstrated that chronic stress affected the physical health of the participants. In addition, many studies identified the effectiveness of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI). Schaufeli, Leiter & Kalimo(1995) studied the validity of the Maslach Burnout Inventory - General Scale (MBI-GS) based on the data from the Netherlands, Canada, and Finland. Richardsen & Martinussen (2004) tested the factors affecting the validity and consistency of the MBI based on sample data from 1590 workers in Norway. Bria, Spânu, Băban & Dumitrașcu (2004) tested the factors affecting the validity and consistency in BMI-GS based on the sample data from 1190 healthcare professional in Romania. Invariant measures in the study included professional roles, gender, age, and years of service.

According to the above literature review, studies of job burnout have aroused extensive attention from academia and the public and some advancements have been made in the past four decades (Gholipour, Anvari, Kalali & Yazdani, 2011; Anvari, Kalali & Gholipour, 2011). Existing research of job burnout in sociology, management, psychology, and other disciplines focused primarily on the antecedents of job burnout and studied the relationship between job burnout and certain situational factors, or a single psychological factor of individuals. In medical disciplines, symptoms of job burnout mainly focused on abnormal psychology and behaviors, confirming that these manifestations are closely associated with job burnout. In addition, current studies of job burnout mainly focused on service sector populations, such as clinicians, teachers, police, and other frontline service personnel. However, job burnout research focusing on individuals of the Millennial Generation is rarely reported. Moreover, empirical studies of the effects of optimism and job characteristics on the job burnout of individuals have not been reported.

Hypothetical Relationships between Optimism and Job burnout

Optimism is a concept that emerged with the rise of positive psychology. The academic definition of optimism has been disputed, and there is no consensus. According to the definition in the Cihai (Word Ocean) dictionary, optimism refers to a persistent mood of happy and self-sufficient towards anyone, anything, and any event. Ancient Taoists in China considered lifestyles in harmony with nature, syncretism between heaven and man, and non-outrageous or presumptuous attitudes as an extremely happy life. Tiger (1979) defined optimism as „a mood or attitude of an individual associated with a community need of a social or material future, which is in his or her favor, or for his or her pleasure". Based on the above definitions, the basic characteristics of optimism can be summarized as a subjective mind or an attitude, which is closely connected to an individual's expectations of the future and affects current or future behaviors. Optimism is a positive attitude that includes three components: cognition, emotion, and behavioral tendencies; emotion is the basic driving force of optimism. A lot of research has been done on optimism from the perspective of the dynamic process. Seligman (1987) believed that optimistic people attribute good things to internal, stable, and common factors, but they attribute bad things to external, temporary, specific and unstable factors. Seligman (1987) named this phenomenon optimistic explanatory style. Psychologists advocating social learning theory view optimism as a learning process, the result of stimulus and response interactions. They think that individuals make the necessary exploration of the causality and significance of a stimulus and response and then decide whether to generate learning. Zhang & Fishbach (2010) proposed that a function of optimism is a self-control strategy, enabling individuals to be optimistic, predict the future, and thus overcoming obstacles and ultimately pursuing the expected results. Zhang & Niu (2013) suggested that the cognitive and emotional factors of optimism (explanatory style theory) and its motivational factor (theory of self-regulation) affect the positive results of optimists.

Chang, Rand & Strunk (2000) studied the correlation between optimism and job burnout and found that optimism was an important psychological resource of individuals and was negatively correlated with job burnout. In addition, Hanssen *et al.* (2014) believed that optimism was an important variable for predicting mental health and social adaptation levels of individuals. Individuals could adjust job burnout through optimism. Optimistic individuals look forward to the future and are less likely to have job burnout. They consider problems to be attributed to external reasons and believe that they are capable of changing the present situation and the outcome of the future, as well as reducing the sense of helplessness themselves. Kluemper, Little & DeGroot (2009) showed that there are two types of optimism: trait optimism and state optimism. Trait optimism has the characteristics of continuity and stability, while state optimism has the characteristics of temporary and volatile.

This study adopts the classification of optimism described by Kluemper *et al.* (2009) to divide optimism into two types: trait and state. Trait optimism represents a personality trait and a habitual behavior across a variety of situations; state optimism represents an attitude, which is based on individual values to give evaluative statements concerning people, objects, and events. As for the condition of the Millennial Generation in China, adolescence is an important period for the formation and exploration of personality and values. The Millennial Generation in China during this period has experienced the implementation of the basic national policy - reform and opening-up policy - as well as rapid economic development, resulting in the great differences of personality and value between the Millennial Generation and the older generations in China. Convenient living conditions and an abundance of material items contributed to a more cheerful character of the Millennial Generation in China. They have confidence in the future and are willing to enjoy life. Furthermore, studies have shown that optimistic individuals usually have stronger immunity and less illness. Optimism allows individuals to maintain a good attitude, seeking the timely supports from a wide range of social networks and taking effective measures to resist external pressure. The hypotheses of this study are put forward:

Hypothesis 1: Trait optimism has a negative impact on job burnout among the individuals of the Millennial Generation in China.

Hypothesis 1a: Trait optimism has a negative impact on emotional exhaustion among the individuals of the Millennial Generation in China.

Hypothesis 1b: Trait optimism has a negative impact on depersonalization among the individuals of the Millennial Generation in China.

Hypothesis 1c: Trait optimism has a negative impact on diminished personal accomplishment among the individuals of the Millennial Generation in China.

Hypothesis 2: State optimism has a negative impact on job burnout among the individuals of the Millennial Generation in China.

Hypothesis 2a: State optimism has a negative impact on emotional exhaustion among the individuals of the Millennial Generation in China.

Hypothesis 2b: State optimism has a negative impact on depersonalization among the individuals of the Millennial Generation in China.

Hypothesis 2c: State optimism has a negative impact on diminished personal accomplishment among the individuals of the Millennial Generation in China.

Hypothetical Relationships between Job Characteristics and Job burnout

In society, all kinds of products and services required for survival and development of individuals originate from organizations. When individuals want to make a career and acquire a higher sense of psychological accomplishment, they should join an organization to work in a specific position. Therefore, in the analysis of job burnout, important factors to be addressed are job characteristics.

Job characteristics are defined as factors associated with the job itself. From the 1960s to the 1980s, many scholars actively explored the dimensions and measures of job characteristics and made some new findings. There are two types of research that focus on the results of variables associated with job characteristics. The first type of study suggests that job characteristics have a close relationship with job satisfaction and organizational commitment. For example, the model of job characteristics proposed by Hackman & Oldham (1974) and the vitamin model proposed by Warr (1985) suggested that job characteristics not only affected motivation and performance of employees, but also their job satisfaction, attendance, and professional happiness. The second type of study investigated the correlation between job characteristics and job burnout. Some scholars proposed and improved the job demands-resources model and classified job characteristics into two general categories: job demands and job resources (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner & Schaufeli, 2001; Bakker, Demerouti & Verbeke, 2004). The job demands-resources model indicated that job demands (e.g., work overload, role ambiguity, and job insecurity) might cause psychological stress, and this psychological stress had different degrees. The lack of job resources (e.g., lack of leadership support, co-worker support, and job autonomy in the workplace) might prevent the achievement of job objectives, leading to the generation of frustration and a sense of failure for the individuals. Demerouti & Bakker (2011) indicated that job resources played a buffer role in the relationship between job demands and job burnout. A certain interaction was found between demands and job resources. Demerouti & Bakker (2011) indicated that individuals who participated in activities that shaped the work environment could fully create and make use of job resources to maintain their job engagement.

Studies have shown that work overload is significantly associated with job burnout, especially in the dimension of emotional exhaustion. Moore (2000) studied the causes of emotional exhaustion among employees from the information technology industry and showed that work overload is the most important contributing factor of emotional exhaustion. Among the Millennial Generation in China, their career lives are often at an early or exploring and growing stage. In this stage, the Millennial Generation not only deeply and accurately understands the job requirements, but also becomes self-sufficient experts, particularly in these drastic changes of China's current environment. In addition, given the higher requirements of innovation in business, the Millennial Generation of China is

currently under heavy work overload, requiring enormous time and efforts to engage at work. On the other hand, under the influence of the national culture of China, individuals from different generations are greatly attached to family lives and domestic affections. The Millennial Generation, at the current age range, has its own families and spares some time and efforts to take care of family life, greatly challenging the physical and mental health of the Millennial Generation. In this regard, we propose the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 3: Work overload has a positive impact on job burnout among the individuals of the Millennial Generation in China.

Hypothesis 3a: Work overload has a positive impact on emotional exhaustion among the individuals of the Millennial Generation in China.

Hypothesis 3b: Work overload has a positive impact on the depersonalization among the individuals of the Millennial Generation in China.

Hypothesis 3c: Work overload has a positive impact on diminished personal accomplishment among the individuals of the Millennial Generation in China.

Role ambiguity refers to the uncertainty of individuals in experiencing their roles in an environment, i.e., the lack of understanding of a given role. Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter (2001) indicated that role ambiguity is associated with job burnout. Alarcon (2011) indicated that role ambiguity is an important cause of job burnout. The Millennial Generation of China belongs to the young employees group and has individual differences in understanding roles at work, which is due to different personalities and perceptions, as well as the non-scientific mana-gement of the organizations, leading to irrational distribution of tasks, which is one of the important causes of role ambiguity. Regardless of any cause of role ambiguity, the Millennial Generation of China has to deal with work pressure due to unclear definitions of their roles at work. This may possibly develop into job burnout over time. In this regard, we propose the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 4: Role ambiguity has a positive impact on the on the job burnout among individuals of the Millennial Generation in China.

Hypothesis 4a: Role ambiguity has a positive impact on emotional exhaustion among the individuals of the Millennial Generation in China.

Hypothesis 4b: Role ambiguity has a positive impact on depersonalization among the individuals of the Millennial Generation in China.

Hypothesis 4c: Role ambiguity has a positive impact on diminished personal accomplishment among individuals of the Millennial Generation in China.

Leadership and co-worker supports are categorized as organization support. Studies have shown that the lack of social support is an important cause of job

burnout; leadership support is more important than co-worker support in this regards (Maslach *et al.*, 2001). Leadership support is defined as leaders' believing in the valuable contributions of their employees, as well as their interests in employee wellbeing to a certain extent (Stamper & Johlke, 2003). Adequate assistance to employees provided by the leaders of the organization effectively encourages task implementation and stress handling, thereby reducing job burnout (Cropanzano, Howes, Grandey & Toth, 1997; Jawahar, Stone & Kisamore, 2007; Walters & Raybould, 2007). Leadership and co-worker supports are rare and precious resources for individuals of the Millennial Generation at workplaces. Leadership and co-worker supports provide great help to the Millennial Generation on spiritual and material levels, such as sharing their knowledge and information, giving positive recognition and praise, and providing a pleasant and relaxed work atmosphere. This supports mentally inspire and provide specific help and guidance to the Millennial Generation, even though the individuals encounter heavy workloads or difficulties at work, allowing the Millennial Generation to complete tasks successfully. In this regard, we propose the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 5: Leadership support has a negative impact on the job burnout among the individuals of the Millennial Generation in China.

Hypothesis 5a: Leadership support has a negative impact on emotional exhaustion among the individuals of the Millennial Generation in China.

Hypothesis 5b: Leadership support has a negative impact on depersonalization among the individuals of the Millennial Generation in China.

Hypothesis 5c: Leadership support has a negative impact on diminished personal accomplishment among individuals of the Millennial Generation in China.

Hypothesis 6: Co-worker support has a negative impact on the job burnout among individuals of the Millennial Generation in China.

Hypothesis 6a: Co-worker support has a negative impact on emotional exhaustion among the individuals of the Millennial Generation in China.

Hypothesis 6b: Co-worker support has a negative impact on depersonalization among individuals of the Millennial Generation in China.

Hypothesis 6c: *Co-worker support has a negative impact on diminished personal accomplishment among individuals of the Millennial Generation in China.*

Job autonomy refers to independent decision making of personnel who implement the task by formulating mission objectives, methods of implementation, and project planning and scheduling. Hall & Savery (1987) showed that deficiency of job autonomy for employees significantly affected their feelings of work pressure. Job autonomy alleviates mood disorders and emotional exhaustion of

employees (Morris & Feldman, 1996, 1997; Bakker, Demerouti & Euwema, 2005). Kim (2008) proposed that job autonomy reduced the possibility of emotional exhaustion of hospitality staff, leading to avoidance of cynical attitudes and improvement of professional performance. Given the differences of characteristics between the new and the older generations in China, individuals of the Millennial Generation pursue career success and successful completion of the work; they also prefer autonomy in work arrangement. Once individuals of the Millennial Generation have job autonomy, they can feel the responsibility from work, and the increased sense of responsibility helps the Millennial Generation remain vigilant in their duties to overcome various difficulties and get the job done. In this regard, we propose the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 7: Job autonomy has a negative impact on job burnout among the individuals of the Millennial Generation in China.

Hypothesis 7a: Job autonomy has a negative impact on emotional exhaustion among the individuals of the Millennial Generation in China.

Hypothesis 7b: Joy autonomy has a negative impact on depersonalization among the individuals of the Millennial Generation in China.

Hypothesis 7c: Job autonomy has a negative impact on diminished personal accomplishment among the individuals of the Millennial Generation in China.

Data, Variables, and Methods

Source of Data and Operationalizing Variables

This study used multi-stage stratified surveys with a random sampling approach to send out 1319 questionnaires from January 2015 to May 2015 to community service workers in seven regions of Guanzhong, Shaannan and Shaanbei areas of Shaanxi Province (i.e., Xi'an, Weinan, Baoji, Tongchuan, Hanzhong, Ankang, and Yulin), to collect relevant data. In China, the community service industry is an important component of the tertiary industry. Community services are the sum of all the welfare benefits provided by different welfare entities within a community, and are generally associated with for-profit organizations (Han, 2010). Of the questionnaires sent out, 1260 questionnaires were returned. This study collected a total of 1125 valid questionnaires, with an effective rate of 85.3%. To ensure the effective rate and the effectiveness of the questionnaires, this survey adopted the following methods. The first method was controlling the issuers of the questionnaires. In addition, to fully understand the background of the issuers, we conducted pre-survey training to introduce interviewing skills to the members of our research team. Members of our research team were responsible for explaining to the survey respondents how to fill out the questionnaires, ensuring that the

security measures being taken, and answering the questions raised by the survey respondents, thereby maximizing the understanding of the questionnaires and cooperation of the survey respondents. The second method was controlling the survey process. To ensure the reasonable sampling and quality of the questionnaire, we used a variety of approaches, such as collaborating with the regional alumni associations to conduct the survey. Therefore, the survey was fully guaranteed without delay, and the research organization was ensured a more targeted investigation, thereby promising good research quality; the third method was carefully screening the questionnaires. To ensure the reliability of the data, questionnaires with aberrant values, which were incompatible with normal rules, data distribution with skewed distribution, obvious regularity, or similar answers, were considered invalid. In addition, questionnaires with default values or more than 10% unanswered questions were also considered invalid. Table 1 demonstrates the generation information of the samples in this study.

Table 1. *General characteristics of community service workers in Shaanxi Province, China.*

Demographic variables	Classification	Frequency	Percentage %
Gender	Male	746	66.3
	Female	379	33.7
Age	≤ 26	623	55.4
	26-36	502	44.6
Education	Junior middle school	10	0.9
	Technical secondary school	97	8.6
	Senior middle school	117	10.4
	College and above	901	80.1
Marriage status	Unmarried	347	30.8
	Married	778	69.2
Length of service	3 years	178	15.8
	3-5years	349	31.0
	6-10 years	372	33.1
	11-15years	159	14.1
	20 years	67	6.0
Position	Grassroots level	661	58.8
	Middle level	365	32.4
	Top level	99	8.8
Total sample		1125	

Job burnout of the individuals of the Millennial Generation in China was considered the dependent variable in this study. We utilized the MBI-GS proposed by Schaufeli, Leiter, Maslach, &Jackson (1996) due to its greatest influence and extensive application as the inventory of job burnout. MBI-GS contained three sub-scale measures, including emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and diminished personal accomplishment, and it had a total of 15 questions (i.e., five questions about emotional exhaustion, four questions of depersonalization, and six questions about personal accomplishment). In this survey, the situation of job burnout was self-reported by the respondents. Despite the measure of personal accomplishment being scored reversely (i.e., the higher the score, the better sense of personal accomplishment), the other measures were positively scored. A five-point Likert scale was used in MBI-GS. Respondents were asked to rate their agreement with each measure and question. For example, respondents were asked to rate from scale of 1 to 5 the following statement, "I feel exhausted after a day of work" (from scale 1-"disagree very much" to scale 5-"agree very much").

Independent variables of this study included optimism and job characteristics. Optimism was measured using a revised version of the Revised Life Orientation Test (LOT-R) (Scheier, Carver & Bridges, 1994), which included a total of six questions. Measurement of trait optimism was according to the methods proposed by Kluemper *et al.* (2009). Respondents were asked to self-report their overall conditions over the past year in the six questions. The measurement of state optimism was according to the methods proposed by Kluemper *et al.* (2009) and Shifren & Hooker(1995) that also included a total of six questions. Respondents were asked to self-report their conditions over the past week in the six questions. The measurement of optimism was scored using a five-point Likert scale. Respondents were asked to rate the degree of each measure and question. For example, respondents were asked to rate from a scale of 1 to 5 to the following statement, "I always hope for the best in uncertain situations" (from scale 1-"disagree very much" to scale 5-"agree very much").

The measurement of job characteristics was conducted using a job content questionnaire (JCQ), based on the Work Design Survey proposed by Morgeson & Humphrey (2006), as well as Occupational stress indicator proposed by Cooper, Sloan & Williams(1988), we combined with the actual needs of this study, and modified the above measures which covered five factors, including work overload, job ambiguity, leadership support, co-worker support, and job autonomy, for the measurement of job characteristics. This questionnaire contained 33 questions, including seven questions about work overload, four questions about job ambiguity, eight questions about leadership support, five questions about co-worker support, and nine questions about job autonomy. Respondents were asked to self-report their conditions of job characteristics. A five-point Likert scale was used to

evaluate the job characteristics of each individual. Respondents were asked to rate the degree of agreement of each measure and question. For example, in the statement of "There is too much workload in a period of time," respondents were asked to rate from a scale 1 to 5 to show their agreement (from scale 1-"disagree very much" to scale 5-"agree very much").

Table 2 demonstrates the reliability analysis of different variables according to the research objectives of this study. Internal consistency of the test scale was assessed with Cronbach's α reliability coefficient. As shown in Table 2, the overall Cronbach's α reliability coefficient of the scales was 0.816, which was higher than the ideal value (i.e., 0.7), indicating that all scales used in this study fulfilled the internal consistency with high reliability. Cronbach's α reliability coefficients of the three subscales were also larger than 0.7, indicating that each subscale fulfilled the internal consistency with high reliability.

Table 2. *Reliability analyses of total scale and subscales of the questionnaires*

Scale	Item Number	Cronbach's α
Revised Life Orientation Test	6	0.835
Job Content Questionnaire	28	0.829
Maslach Burnout Inventory-General Survey	16	0.871
Total Scale	50	0.816

Analytical Methods and Strategies

This study is based on the survey data of community service workers in Shaanxi Province, China. Hierarchical regression analysis and dominance analyses were performed to explore the impacts of optimism and job characteristics on the job burnout of the Millennial Generation in China. The advantage of the hierarchical regression analysis is that it can accurately measure the correlation degree between various factors, which improves prediction outcome. The advantages of dominance analysis include the ability to show the predictive power of each variable, facilitating the comparison of the strength of predictive power.

In this study, the data analysis was divided into two parts: (1) the hierarchical regression analysis based on all samples to obtain the degree of influence of the independent variable on the dependent variable, to examine the predictive power of the dependent variable and to verify our hypotheses; and (2) the dominance analysis of the all samples to obtain the strength of predictive power of the independent variable on the dependent variable and to provide a new direction to prevent job burnout of the Millennial Generation in China.

Analysis Results

Hierarchical Regression Analysis between Optimism or Job Characteristics and Each Dimension of Job burnout among Individuals of the Millennial Generation

After collecting the data, we used SPSS 20.0 software (SPSS, Chicago, IL) for statistical and preliminary analysis. In the hierarchical regression analysis, we introduced the demographic variables in the first layer. Trait optimism and state optimism were introduced to represent optimism, and work overload, job ambiguity, leadership support, co-worker support, and job autonomy were used to represent job characteristics in the second layer of regression analysis. Through the calculating of ΔR2 and their significances, we evaluated the degree of influence of the introduced independent variables on the dependent variable of this study. No collinearity was found between the independent variables. Thus, the regression equations were introduced to examine the predictive power of the dependent variable (Table 3).

Table 3. *Hierarchical regression analysis of each dimension of optimism and job characteristics associated with job burnout among individuals of the Millennial Generation*

	Variables	Emotional Exhaustion Y_1	Depersonalization Y_2	Diminished Personal Accomplishment Y_3
First step	Demographic Variables			
	Gender	0.028	-0.067	-0.005
	Length of Service	0.004	-0.028	-0.108*
	Marriage Status	-0.026	-0.051	-0.071
	Position	-0.055	-0.040	-0.067
Second step	Optimism /Job Characteristics			
	Trait Optimism X_1	-0.134**	-0.128**	-0.142**
	State Optimism X_2	-0.011	-0.023	-0.016
	Work Overload X_3	0.243***	0.210***	0.112**
	Role Ambiguity X_4	0.093*	0.040	0.012
	Leadership Support X_5	-0.143*	-0.189***	-0.142**
	Co-worker Support X_6	0.019	-0.048	-0.124**
	Job Autonomy X_7	-0.083	-0.181***	-0.240***

R^2		0.108	0.203	0.193
F		7.799***	16.491***	15.549***
ΔR^2		0.116	0.192	0.163
ΔF		13.616***	26.847***	22.498***

Note: * P <0.05,** P <0.01,*** P <0.001, the same below

The regression equations of this study are as follows:

$$Y_1 = -0.134X_1 + 0.243X_3 + 0.093X_4 - 0.143X_5$$
$$Y_2 = -0.128X_1 + 0.210X_3 - 0.189X_5 - 0.181X_7$$
$$Y_3 = -0.142X_1 + 0.112X_3 - 0.142X_5 - 0.124X_6 - 0.240X_7$$

The regression equation shows that, after controlling the demographic variables, trait optimism had significantly negative impacts on emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and diminished personal accomplishment (P < 0.01), with the path coefficients of - 0.134, - 0.128, and - 0.142, respectively, proving hypotheses H1a, H1b, and H1c. State optimism had no significant impact on job burnout (non-significant under the conditions of P < 0.05, P < 0.01, and P < 0.001), confirming that hypotheses H2a, H2b, and H2c were not tenable.

In addition, of the job characteristics, work overload had significant positive impacts on emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and diminished personal accomplishment, with the path coefficients of 0.243, 0.21, and 0.112, respectively, proving hypotheses H3a, H3b, and H3c. Job ambiguity had a significant, positive impact on emotional exhaustion (P < 0.05), with the path coefficient of 0.093, proving hypothesis H4a but not hypotheses H4b and H4c. Leadership support had significant negative impacts on emotional exhaustion (P < 0.05), depersonalization (P < 0.001), and diminished personal accomplishment (P < 0.01), with the path coefficients of - 0.143, - 0.189, and - 0.142, respectively, proving hypotheses H5a, H5b, and H5c. Co-worker support had a significant, negative impact on diminished personal accomplishment (P < 0.01), with the path coefficient of - 0.124, proving hypothesis H6c but not hypotheses H6a and H6b. Job autonomy had significant negative impacts on depersonalization and diminished personal accomplishment, with the path coefficients of - 0.181 and 0.24, respectively, proving hypotheses H7b and H7c, but not hypothesis H7a.

Lastly, the regression analysis demonstrated that trait optimism, work overload, job ambiguity, and leadership support contributed to the prediction of emotional exhaustion, with the explained variance increasing by 11.6%. Trait optimism, work overload, leadership support, and job autonomy contributed to the prediction

of depersonalization, with the explained variance increasing by 19.2%. Trait optimism, work overload, leadership support, co-worker support, and job autonomy contributed to the prediction of diminished personal accomplishment, with the explained variance increasing by 16.3%. These results suggested that each dimension of job characteristics had predictive capacity on specific performance of job burnout.

Dominance Analysis of Each Dimension of Job Characteristics on Job burnout among Individuals of the Millennial Generation

We used dominance analysis to evaluate the predictive effects of job characteristics on different dimensions of job burnout among individuals of the Millennial Generation of China (given the little impact of state optimism on the job burnout among the individuals of the Millennial Generation, this paper does not discuss the predictive power of trait and state optimisms on different dimensions of job burnout among the individuals of the Millennial Generation) (see *Tables* 4, 5, and 6 for details).

Table 4. *Relative contributions of work overload, role ambiguity and leadership support for the prediction of emotional exhaustion*

Variables	R^2	ΔR^2		
		X_3	X_4	X_5
K=0, Average contribution	-	0.060	0.033	0.034
X_3 (Work Overload)	0.060	-	0.027	0.030
X_4 (Role Ambiguity)	0.033	0.053	-	0.016
X_5 (Leadership Support)	0.034	0.056	0.013	-
K=1, Average contribution		0.055	0.020	0.023
$X_3 X_4$	0.087	-	-	0.015
$X_3 X_5$	0.092	-	0.010	-
$X_4 X_5$	0.050	0.052	-	-
K=2, Average contribution		0.052	0.010	0.015
$X_3 X_4 X_5$	0.102	-	-	-
Total average contribution		0.056	0.021	0.024
The percentage of predicted variance (%)		55.45	20.79	23.76

According to the qualitative dominance analysis in *Table 4*, the explained variation showed that work overload, role ambiguity, and leadership support contributed 55.45%, 20.79%, and 23.76%, respectively, indicating that work

overload was most effective in predicting emotional exhaustion in the Millennial Generation.

Table 5. *Relative contributions of work overload, job autonomy and leadership support for the prediction of depersonalization*

Variables	R^2	ΔR^2		
		X_3	X_5	X_7
K=0, Average contribution	-	0.060	0.098	0.087
X_3 (Work Overload)	0.060	-	0.091	0.073
X_5 (Leadership Support)	0.098	0.053	-	0.037
X_7 (Job Autonomy)	0.087	0.047	0.048	-
K=1, Average contribution		0.050	0.070	0.055
X_3X_5	0.152	-	-	0.029
X_3X_7	0.135	-	0.046	-
X_5X_7	0.135	0.046	-	-
K=2, Average contribution		0.046	0.046	0.029
$X_3X_5X_7$	0.181	-	-	-
Total average contribution		0.052	0.071	0.057
The percentage of predicted variance (%)		28.89	39.44	31.67

According to the qualitative dominance analysis in *Table 5*, the explained variation showed that work overload, job autonomy, and leadership support contributed 28.89%, 39.44%, and 31.67%, respectively, indicating that leadership support was most effective in predicting depersonalization in the Millennial Generation.

Table 6. *Relative contributions of work overload, job autonomy, leadership and co-workers' supports for the prediction of diminished personal accomplishment*

Variables	R^2	ΔR^2			
		X_3	X_5	X_6	X_7
K=0, Average contribution	-	0.023	0.074	0.062	0.101
X_3 (Work Overload)	0.023	-	0.070	0.052	0.092
X_5 (Leadership Support)	0.074	0.020	-	0.020	0.055
X_6 (Co-worker Support)	0.062	0.013	0.031	-	0.076
X_7 (Job Autonomy)	0.101	0.015	0.026	0.036	-
K=1, Average contribution		0.016	0.042	0.036	0.074
X_3X_5	0.093	-	-	0.015	0.049
X_3X_6	0.074	-	0.033	-	0.072
X_3X_7	0.116	-	0.026	0.030	-
X_5X_6	0.094	0.014	-	0.021	0.053
X_5X_7	0.127	0.009	0.008	0.018	-
X_6X_7	0.137	0.014	-	-	-

K=2, Average contribution		0.012	0.022	0.013	0.058
$X_3X_5X_6$	0.107	-	-	-	0.048
$X_3X_5X_7$	0.142	-	0.010	-	-
$X_3X_6X_7$	0.146	-	-	-	-
$X_5X_6X_7$	0.145	0.010	-	0.021	-
K=3, Average contribution		0.010	0.010	0.021	0.048
$X_3X_5X_6X_7$	0.155	-	-	-	-
Total average contribution		0.015	0.037	0.033	0.070
The percentage of predicted variance (%)		9.68	23.87	21.29	45.16

According to the qualitative dominance analysis in *Table 6*, the explained variation showed that work overload, leadership support, co-worker support, and job autonomy contributed 9.68%, 23.87%, 21.29%, and 45.16%, respectively, indicating that job autonomy was most effective in predicting a diminished personal accomplishment in the Millennial Generation.

Discussion

This study hypothesized that a high degree of trait optimism, state optimism, leadership support, co-worker support, and job autonomy reduced pressures at work and effectively alleviated job burnout of the individuals of the Millennial Generation; and workload and role ambiguity led to job burnout of the individuals of the Millennial Generation. Through this empirical study, we proved that optimism and job characteristics have impacts on job burnout of the individuals of the Millennial Generation. Although some minor differences were found in the measurement of optimism, job characteristics, and job burnout, as well as the restriction of the scope of study to community service workers of Shaanxi Province, China, the results of this study were consistent with the existing findings of relevant studies around the world.

First, *Table 3* indicated that optimism had impacts on job burnout of the individuals of the Millennial Generation. Specifically, of the two dimensions of optimism, trait optimism had a significant impact on the job burnout but not the state optimism among the individuals of the Millennial Generation. This finding confirmed that optimism can be divided into two categories, trait optimism and state optimism, proposed by Klumemper *et al.* (2009). Researchers can better understand optimism from the perspectives of trait optimism and state optimism, which promotes the development of the theory of optimism. In Table 3, impacts of trait optimism on the three dimensions of job burnout were listed in descending order: diminished personal accomplishment, emotional exhaustion, and depersonalization. These results illustrate that the management of various organizations

in the society, particularly the organizations with dramatic environmental changes, who look for member of the Millennial Generation with optimistic traits to participate the labor force and focus on training optimistic traits in the Millennial Generation, have important and practical significance to effectively resist and alleviate the job burnout. In addition, based on the highly contextual features of state optimism, effective regulation by organization management to create a harmonious and forgiving working atmosphere can help form and consolidate optimistic attitudes of the Millennial Generation, thereby assisting the completion of work tasks.

Second, *Table 3* showed that job characteristics had an impact on job burnout of individuals of the Millennial Generation in China. Specifically: (1) work overload had a significant, positive impact on job burnout of individuals of the Millennial Generation. In addition to the regular duties at work and routines of daily life, as well as the limited energy of the Millennial Generation, an overwhelming workload easily causes job burnout, which could be fully manifested in workers' emotions, behaviors, and mental states. Timms, Brough & Graham (2012) confirmed a significant correlation between work overload and job burnout. Although we limited the scope of the study to community service workers of Shaanxi Province, China, our findings are consistent with the results of Timms *et al.* (2012); (2) Role ambiguity had a significant impact on emotional exhaustion and led to physical and mental fatigue. The clarification of roles in the workplace helps the Millennial Generation understand their roles and the requirement of organization. These findings were consistent with the study of Maslach *et al.* (2001); (3) Leadership support had a significant, negative impact on job burnout, which had descending degrees of influence in depersonalization, emotional exhaustion, and diminished personal accomplishment. Leadership usually represents the image of the organization, reflecting the expectations and requirements of the organization. Leadership support provides more encouragement and help than co-worker support to the Millennial Generation; (4) Co-worker support had a negative impact on the diminished personal accomplishment. This result is consistent to the findings of Walter & Raybould (2007). Co-worker support in all aspects provides spiritual encouragement and specific help and guidance to the Millennial Generation at work. It effectively alleviates the job burnout and inspires the Millennial Generation's confidence at work; (5) Job autonomy had negative impacts on depersonalization and diminished personal accomplishment. These findings are consistent with the conclusion of Kim (2008). Job autonomy minimizes the cynical attitudes of the Millennial Generation and promotes their sense of responsibility and their professionalism.

Third, *Tables 4*, *5*, and *6* showed the results of dominance analysis. In the Millennial Generation, work overload had the strongest predictive power in emotional exhaustion; leadership support had the strongest predictive power in depersonalization; and job autonomy had the strongest predictive power in

diminished personal accomplishment. To prevent the job burnout of the Millennial Generation in China, administrators of the organizations should focus on the work overload, leadership support and job autonomy in the management. They should emphasize a "people-oriented" approach to create a relaxed working environment, respecting the physical and mental needs of employees. They should also rationally allocate their tasks according to their job positions and give more job autonomy to the employee. Moreover, to prevent the job burnout of the Millennial Generation, leading to the transformation of individual problems to social and psychological problems, administrators of the organization should implement scientific management and advocate humanistic management to maintain the mental health of the Millennial Generation, establishing a highly efficient organization and a harmonious society.

Importantly, results between studies conducted in specific regions, industries, and age groups and the existing reports (i.e., studies conducted without regional and age restrictions) were basically consistent. Further study will be necessary to verify the impact of different degrees of regional development and population density on job burnout.

Conclusions

This study used the survey data from community service workers of Shaanxi Province, China in 2015 to explore the impacts of the dual perspectives of optimism and job characteristics on job burnout of individuals of the Millennial Generation in China. In addition, we identified the predictive power of different dimensions of job characteristics on job burnout and obtained the following conclusions. (1) Optimism was classified into trait optimism and state optimism. Trait optimism had a significant, negative impact, while state optimism had no impact on job burnout of the individuals of the Millennial Generation; the greater the degree of trait optimism, the more ability of the individual to alleviate job burnout. The Millennial Generation with trait optimism could adjust individual behaviors to actively and effectively complete their tasks and alleviate job burnout. (2) Job characteristics were divided into five dimensions: work overload, leadership support, role ambiguity, co-worker support, and job autonomy. Work overload had a significant, positive impact on job burnout; leadership support had a significant, negative impact on job burnout; role ambiguity had a significant, positive impact on the emotional exhaustion of job burnout; co-worker support had a negative impact on the diminished personal accomplishment of job burnout; and job autonomy had negative impacts on depersonalization and diminished personal accomplishment of job burnout. The more the leadership and co-workers provide support, the higher the job autonomy and ability of the individual to alleviate job burnout. Leadership and co-worker supports provide spiritual

encouragement and assistance at work. A high degree of job autonomy could enhance the sense of responsibility of the Millennial Generation. These factors promote successful completion of work and delayed the generation of job burnout. (3) Among the five dimensions of the job characteristics, work overload had the strongest predictive power on emotional exhaustion; leader support had the strongest predictive power on depersonalization; and job autonomy had the strongest predictive power on diminished personal accomplishment.

Although this study, to some extent, has made up for the shortage of empirical research in the theoretical system of job burnout among the individuals of the Millennial Generation in China, this study still has some limitations. First of all, this study is limited by the cross-sectional research data, respondents of the questionnaires and interviews were restricted to community service workers in Shaanxi Province, China, limiting the representativeness of the sample and the universality of the conclusions. In fact, further studies should be based on the current findings to expand the sources of sampling from the Millennial Generation by adding the sample data from eastern coastal areas or other regions to conduct multi-regional comparative analysis. This will investigate the regional, industrial, and cultural differences in the impacts of optimism and job characteristics on the job burnout among the individuals of the Millennial Generation in China, improving the reliability of the research findings. Second, the embodiment of optimistic traits and adjustment of job characteristics require a period of time, resulting in a delay of their impacts on job burnout of individuals of the Millennial Generation. Cross-sectional data from the community service workers in Shaanxi Province, China, did not adequately reflect the dynamic process of the influences of optimism and job characteristics and gave relatively strong assumptions in the analysis. Further studies could consider doing follow-up surveys with the Millennial Generation to obtain time series data, enrich the research methods of this study, and avoid a shortage of the existing cross-sectional data. Lastly, this paper only focused on the dual perspectives, optimism and job characteristics, to study the problems of job burnout, so it obviously could not cover all factors affecting job burnout. The degrees of job burnout of individuals of the Millennial Generation were not only caused by the above two factors. Hence, further considerations of researchers from management and psychology fields are necessary to incorporate more influencing factors that establish a study model; this also helps evaluate cross-impacts on the job burnout of individuals of the Millennial Generation to better address the problems of job burnout.

Acknowledgements

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