Value congruence, importance and success and in the workplace: Links with well-being and burnout amongst mental health practitioners

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A B S T R A C T

Living according to one's personal values has implications for wellbeing, and incongruence between personal and workplace values has been associated with burnout. Using the SGP Card Sorting Task (Ciarrochi & Bailey, 2008), this study explored mental health practitioners' personal life values and personal work-related values, and their relationships with wellbeing and burnout. Congruence between life and work-related values was related to wellbeing and perceived accomplishment at work. Those whose personal values were consistent with the commonly-shared values of a caring profession experienced lower burnout and higher personal wellbeing. Successfully pursuing one's work values predicted lower burnout and greater wellbeing. Honesty, clearly defined work, competence and meeting obligations were associated with lower burnout and higher wellbeing. Acceptance of others and helping others were associated with lower burnout. The implications for recovery-oriented practice are noted. Values clarification exercises may invigorate the sense of meaning in practitioners' work, increasing wellbeing and reducing staff burnout.

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1. Introduction

A career in mental health can be both emotionally demanding and rewarding, being linked to psychological distress (Harris, Cumming, & Campbell, 2006) and burnout (Leiter & Harvie, 1996; Maslach, 1982) but also to positive outcomes such as wellbeing (Graham & Shier, 2010; Ragusa & Crowther, 2012). The wellbeing of mental health practitioners is vital to quality service delivery, and consequently, job satisfaction (Rose & Glass, 2006; Salyers, Rollins, Kelly, Lysaker, & Williams, 2013). However, mental health workers tend to experience high levels of burnout, and this has been implicated as contributing to staff turnover (see Paris & Hoge, 2010 for a review). High levels of turnover in community-based mental health service organisations impacts on the quality of service delivery and staff morale (Aarons, Sommerfeld, Hecht, Silovsky, & Chaffin, 2009). In an extensive review

of studies of burnout amongst mental health practitioners, Leiter and Harvie (1996) concluded that burnout was most evident when workplace issues impacted on the worker's ability to address the needs of his or her clients; that is, when workers were unable to realise their values through their work (Leiter & Harvie, 1996).

Values can be seen as guiding principles that give meaning to our actions and behaviours (Rokeach, 1973; Schwartz & Bilsky, 1987). Rokeach (1973) distinguished between terminal values (desirable end-states, e.g. self-respect, wisdom), and instrumental values (modes of conduct in the service of terminal values, e.g. helpfulness, broad-mindedness). Burnout is comprised of three components: emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). High levels of emotional exhaustion can lead to workers developing an increase in depersonalisation as a coping mechanism for dealing with difficult clients (Winstanley & Whittington, 2002), whilst reducing levels of emotional exhaustion can buffer against increases in depersonalisation (Lloyd, Bond, & Flaxman, 2013). Actions taken in pursuit of values have psychological and practical consequences, which may lead to perceptions, attitudes and behaviours that facilitate healthy coping strategies (Sagiv & Schwartz, 2000) and thus may protect from development of dysfunctional coping strategies such as depersonalisation.

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Indeed, successful pursuit of values has been shown to be an important predictor of vitality and wellbeing (Elliot & Sheldon, 1997; Ferssizidis, Adams, Kashdan, Plummer, Mishra, & Ciarrochi, 2010). Prioritising social values, in particular, has been linked to wellbeing (Ferssizidis et al., 2010; Konow & Earley, 2008), with the prioritising of friendship and love associated with enhanced emotional wellbeing (Ciarrochi & Bailey, 2008).

Values have been categorised into 10 universal value domains, which vary in degree of conflict or compatibility with one another (Schwartz & Bilsky, 1987). The pursuit of conflicting values, may therefore result in exposure to negative internal experiences (thoughts, emotions, sensations), which people may seek to avoid (Ciarrochi & Bailey, 2008). Such experiential avoidance can become problematic when it develops into a pattern against valued action (Soriano, Valverde, & Martinez, 2004). Indeed, experiential avoidance (Kashdan, Breen, & Julian, 2010), and thought and emotion suppression (Haga, Kraft, & Corby, 2009; Wegner, Schneider, Knutson, & McMahon, 1991) have been linked to negative wellbeing outcomes, as has attempting to prevent aversive outcomes by pursuing avoidance goals (e.g. Elliot & Sheldon, 1997). The use of escape-avoidance coping strategies has been linked to higher burnout amongst mental health workers (Leiter & Harvie, 1996), whilst conversely, psychological acceptance and values-based action was found to be associated with lower burnout and higher wellbeing amongst physical rehabilitation staff (McCracken & Yang, 2008).

One source of such conflict occurs when an individual's personal values are at odds with the values of their work environment. The congruence between workplace values and an individual's personal values in life has implications for wellbeing and burnout (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001; Sagiv, Roccas, & Hazan, 2004). For example, congruence between business and psychology students' values and those of their academic environment was associated with enhanced wellbeing (Sagiv & Schwartz, 2000), while conflict between personal values and organisational values has been found to be related to burnout (Maslach & Leiter, 1997) and to stress (Bouckenooghe, Buelens, Fontaine, & Vanderheyden, 2005). This study is novel in that it looks at an individual's personally-held work values, rather than the values of the organisation. In one of the few studies comparing personally-held work values and personal (life-in-general) values, Leuty and Hansen (2012) concluded that work values were related to, but distinct from personal values, and that the two should be assessed separately. They asserted that while work values were important to job satisfaction, there was a need for more research into the role of personal values in work outcomes (Leuty & Hansen, 2012). In the current study, we examined the congruence between personal life values and personal work values, and their relationships to wellbeing and burnout amongst mental health practitioners. Leuty and Hansen (2011) identified six domains common to extant measures of work values: work environment, competence, autonomy, status, organisational culture and relationships. Rather than using pre-defined sets of work and life values, we asked participants to choose from a broad range of values to identify both their work and life values. In addition, we examined perceived success in pursuing important values – a dimension frequently found in the goals literature (e.g. Elliot & Sheldon, 1997) but rarely in the values literature (Veage, Ciarrochi, & Heaven, 2011).

Congruence between important life and work values was expected to be associated with higher wellbeing and lower burnout (e.g. Bouckenooghe et al., 2005; Sagiv et al., 2004), as was successful pursuit of life and work values (Ciarrochi, Fisher, & Lane, 2011; Leiter & Harvie, 1996). Those who endorse and are successful in the pursuit of pro-social values, in keeping with a caring profession, were expected to report greater wellbeing and less burnout (Ferssizidis et al., 2010; Kasser & Ahuvia, 2002; Sagiv et al., 2004).

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Participants were 106 mental health professionals comprising psychologists, social workers, occupational therapists, welfare workers and registered nurses (72 female, 25 male, 9 unidentified) from five non-government mental health organisations in Australia. Ages ranged from 18 to 60 years (median=38 years). The participants were involved in a larger intervention study focusing on facilitating the transfer of training in a service delivery model (Deane et al., 2010). The data reported here is from the baseline data collection.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Maslach burnout inventory-human services survey (MBI; Maslach & Jackson, 1981)

The MBI comprises three subscales, emotional exhaustion (EE), personal accomplishment (PA) and depersonalisation (DP). It consists of 22 items, rated on a 7-point Likert scale from 0 (never) to 6 (everyday), with some items reverse-scored. An example item is "I feel emotionally drained" (EE), "I can easily understand how my recipients feel about things" (DP) and "I feel I'm positively influencing other people's lives through my work" (PA). Higher scores on the EE and DP scales indicate higher burnout, while high scores on the PA scales indicate lower burnout. The reliability and validity of the MBI has been well described (Maslach & Jackson, 1981) and it is used extensively within mental health settings (Leiter & Harvie, 1996).

2.2.2. Psychological well-being scales (PWB; Ryff & Keyes, 1995)

An 18-item version of the PWB scales was used to measure six dimensions of wellbeing: personal growth, positive relations with others, autonomy, self-acceptance, environmental mastery and purpose in life (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Items are scored using a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (agree strongly) to 7 (disagree strongly), with some items reverse-scored. Example items are "When I look at the story of my life, I am pleased with how things have turned out so far" and "I like most parts of my personality". Higher scores indicate higher wellbeing. PWB has been widely used and has demonstrated construct and concurrent validity (Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Ryff & Singer, 2008).

2.2.3. The survey of guiding principles: card sorting task (SGP: Ciarrochi & bailey, 2008)

The SGP Card Sorting Task is based on the survey of life principles, a values clarification exercise derived from a synthesis of the values and goals literature (Ciarrochi & Bailey, 2008). Sixty cards represent principles closely mapped to items from Schwartz (1992), Rokeach (1973) and Braithwaite and Law (1985). Cards represent 10 universal value domains: power, achievement, hedonism, stimulation, self-direction, universalism, benevolence, tradition, conformity and security, as well as items related to religion, sexuality and experiential avoidance. Each card has a brief description of a guiding principle, such as 'Being ambitious and hard working'; 'Having an exciting life'; 'Avoiding self-doubt'.

Using a two-stage card-sorting methodology, participants first identify their 15 most important guiding principles in their life generally ('Life') and complete the 'Principle success rating sheet: Life in general', on which they list their 15 identified important life principles, and rate how successful they have been at putting these principles into practice over the previous 3 months. Ratings range from 1 (Not at all successful) to 5 (Highly successful). Next, participants repeat the procedure in relation to their current job

('Work'), completing the 'Principle success rating sheet: Workplace focus.' Ratings of principle importance and success on the SGP have been found to correlate with indices of wellbeing (Ciarrochi & Bailey, 2008) and personality (Veage et al., 2011), while the ability to identify important principles and success in the pursuit of those principles have been linked to less suicidal ideation amongst war veterans (Bahraini et al., 2013).

2.3. Procedure

Staff members were approached by their managers to participate in the study. Questionnaires were completed at the beginning of a two-day training workshop, and the SGP Card Sorting Task was completed at the end of the workshop. The workshop was related to a wider study focusing on facilitating the transfer of training in mental health professionals and is not reported on here (see Deane et al., 2010).

3. Results

3.1. Preliminary analyses

Reliability for the PWB and MBI was determined using Cronbach's alpha. For PWB Total, $\alpha=.83$. Cronbach's alpha for the subscales ranged from $\alpha=.21$ (purpose in life) to $\alpha=.71$ (self-acceptance). Only those with $\alpha > .60$ were included in analyses; these were self-acceptance and positive relations with others ($\alpha=.63$). Cronbach's alphas for the MBI were MBI total, $\alpha=.90$, EE, $\alpha=.89$, DP, $\alpha=.71$, and PA, $\alpha=.82$.

Means and standard deviations were PWB total, $M=5.75$ ($SD=.72$), self-acceptance, $M=5.68$ ($SD=1.22$), positive relations, $M=5.72$ ($SD=1.22$). To compute an MBI total score, the personal accomplishment scores were reversed. MBI total, $M=1.88$ ($SD=.67$), PA, $M=2.88$ ($SD=.82$), EE, $M=1.56$ ($SD=1.03$) and DP, $M=.51$ ($SD=.76$).

3.2. Descriptives – work and life values

Important values were defined as those which were not only endorsed by the participant, but which were actively pursued within the previous 3 months. Table 1 displays the frequencies of those values in each domain that were being actively pursued by at least 30 participants. The most frequently endorsed values in the Work domain were *competency, accomplishment, being honest, acceptance of others as they are, helping others* and *meeting obligations,* reflecting a combination of achievement and pro-social values. Most frequently endorsed in the life domain were *loving relationships, being honest, acceptance of others as they are, striving to be a better person, feeling good about oneself* and *genuine friendships,* reflecting a combination of pro-social and personal development values. Only one value representing an avoidance goal was rated by 30 participants, this was *avoid self-doubt* in the Work domain.

Also shown are the participants' ratings of success in pursuing these top-rated values. Ratings for work values ranged from $M=2.80$ ($SD=.76$) for *avoid self-doubt*, to $M=4.28$ ($SD=.83$) for *being honest*. For life values, success ratings ranged from $M=2.97$ ($SD=1.07$) for *physical fitness* to $M=4.16$ ($SD=.72$) for *self-sufficiency*. Ratings represented better than 'moderately successful' in all but three instances.

3.3. Important values, wellbeing and burnout

A series of t-tests were conducted to compare wellbeing and burnout in those who chose a particular value and those who did not. Examining those values in each domain endorsed by at least 30 participants, the two groups were compared on total PWB and MBI. We report p-values of .05 (2-tail), given the exploratory nature of this research and its potential to guide future research to replicate or extend our findings.

Honesty was the most frequently endorsed value overall, and those who chose *honesty* in their top 15 had lower burnout scores, whether chosen in the work domain ($t=2.56_{(94)}$, $p < .01$) or the life domain ($t=2.24_{(94)}$, $p < .05$). Choosing *accomplishment* ($t= -4.60_{(94)}$, $p < .001$) and *curiosity* ($t= -2.31_{(89)}$, $p < .05$) in the work domain was associated

Table 1
Frequencies and success ratings of values endorsed by at least 30 participants.

	Work domain			Life domain	
	Frequency	Success ratings M (SD)		Frequency	Success ratings M (SD)
Competency	93	3.62 (.77)	Loving relationships	82	3.83 (1.06)
Accomplishment	85	3.36 (.86)	Honesty	72	4.11 (.96)
Honesty	80	4.28 (.78)	Accepting others	65	3.69 (.90)
Accepting others	80	4.01 (.95)	Better person	63	3.22 (.73)
Helping others	74	4.09 (.80)	Feel good about self	63	2.97 (.93)
Fulfil obligations	64	3.95 (.82)	Genuine friendships	61	3.77 (1.04)
Solving problems	64	3.72 (.81)	Loyalty	60	4.10 (.77)
Wisdom	61	3.57 (.88)	Wisdom	58	3.53 (.73)
Ambition	59	3.93 (.87)	Security	56	3.73 (1.02)
Curiosity	54	3.76 (.82)	Accomplishment	53	3.00 (.98)
Justice for others	53	3.79 (.95)	Helping others	48	4.02 (.70)
Organising things	49	3.73 (.95)	Curiosity	47	3.51 (1.00)
Teaching others	48	3.65 (.79)	Competency	45	3.60 (.72)
Caring for others	48	4.15 (.80)	Caring for others	40	4.00 (.85)
Researching	45	3.49 (1.04)	Justice for others	39	3.56 (1.10)
Creativity	42	3.21 (.98)	Self-sufficiency	38	4.16 (.72)
Better person	40	3.43 (.68)	Nature	33	3.70 (1.16)
Defined work	39	3.33 (.98)	Positive mood states	32	3.00 (.80)
Practical work	35	3.97 (.71)	Physical fitness	30	2.97 (1.07)
Resolving disputes	34	3.68 (.84)			
Feel good about self	33	3.39 (.79)			
Avoid self-doubt	30	2.80 (.76)			

with higher PWB scores. An unexpected result was that those who endorsed *wisdom* in the life domain reported higher burnout than those who did not ($t = -2.40_{(94)}$, $p < .05$). This was evident only in the personal accomplishment subscale of MBI ($t = -2.05_{(94)}$, $p < .05$). A tentative finding was also that in the life domain, those who chose *being wealthy* reported lower PWB ($M = 3.17$, $SD = .59$) than those who did not ($M = 3.57$, $SD = .39$), ($t = 3.26_{(94)}$, $p < .01$). However, only a small number of participants ($n = 13$) chose *being wealthy* in their top 15 values.

3.4. Values success, wellbeing and burnout

Since not all variables met the criteria for normality, Spearman correlations were used throughout. Table 2 shows the correlations in each domain between success in the pursuit of values and burnout and wellbeing. Only those with $n > 30$, and which significantly correlated with one of the global scales, are shown.

Perceived success in *honesty* was associated with MBI and PWB, correlating with five scales in both domains. In the work domain, correlations ranged from $r = .24$ with PWB total, to $r = -.48$ with MBI total. In the life domain, correlations ranged from $r = -.26$ with PA to $r = -.39$ with MBI total. The results suggest that the value of *honesty* is pervasive in this workforce, and is negatively associated with staff burnout and positively related to wellbeing.

Perceived *competence* and *clearly defined work* were achievement-related values in the work domain associated with both burnout and wellbeing, while success with *accomplishment* correlated negatively with burnout, but was not related to wellbeing. *Meeting obligations* in the work domain was associated with all subscales of

PWB and with the PA aspect of burnout. These results suggest that the clarity of one's goals and the processes involved in their attainment are important for the wellbeing of mental health practitioners. As expected within a helping profession, we found that success in pursuing pro-social values such as *accepting others as they are* and *helping others*, both in the work and the life domain, was related to lower burnout.

It was found that success in the pursuit of *wisdom* as a work value was related to lower emotional exhaustion ($r = -.27$, $p < .05$, not shown in Table 2), which contrasts with the finding that the endorsement of this value in the life domain was associated with poorer personal accomplishment ratings.

Mean success ratings were used to create variables for overall work value success and overall life value success. Relationships of work and life value success with wellbeing and burnout are shown in Table 3. While success in work values was related to all variables, success in life values was related to all except PA and positive relations subscales.

Finally, multiple regression was used to examine whether success in work and life values made independent contributions to well-being and burnout. A summary of the results is shown in Table 4. Twenty-one per cent of the variance in MBI was accounted for by values success, of which 11.2% was uniquely contributed by work values success. No significant effects were found for DP. Successful pursuit of work and life values accounted for 13% of the variance in PWB, of which 6% was uniquely contributed by success in work values. Neither work nor life values success accounted for significant variance in the self-acceptance or positive relations subscales of PWB. For all variables, when successful pursuit of

Table 2
Correlations of values success ratings with burnout and wellbeing.

| Value | Maslach burnout inventory (MBI) | | | | | | | | Psychological well-being (PWB) | | | | | |
| | MBI total | | Personal accomplishment | | Emotional exhaustion | | Depersonalisation | | PWB total | | Self-acceptance | | Positive relations | |
	Work	Life	Work	Life	Work	Life	Work	Life	Work	Life	Work	Life	Work	Life
Competence	−.39***	–	.27*	–	−.28**	–	−.26*	–	.36**	–	.28**	–	.28**	–
Accomplishment	−.43***	–	.25*	–	−.43***	–	−.23*	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Accept others	−.38**	−.36**	–	–	−.39*	−.34**	−.28*	−.27*	–	–	–	–	–	–
Honesty	−.48**	−.39**	.28*	.31*	−.46**	−.36**	−.35**	−.34**	.24*	.29*	–	–	–	–
Helping others	−.27*	−.36**	.26*	–	−.27*	−.35*	–	–	–	.37*	–	–	–	.35*
Feel good about self	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	.62***	–	.47***	–	.42***
Obligations	–	na	.26*	na	–	na	–	na	.48***	na	.33**	na	.31*	na
Defined work	−.49**	na	.39*	na	−.43**	na	–	na	.59***	na	.34*	na	.44**	na
Resolve disputes	–	na	–	na	–	na	–	na	.37**	na	–	na	.46**	na
Genuine friendships	na	–	na	–	na	–	na	–	na	.40**	na	.29*	na	.35**
Self-sufficiency	na	−.35*	na	–	na	−.38*	na	−.35*	na	–	na	–	na	–
Positive states	na	–	na	–	na	–	na	–	na	.61***	na	.42*	na	.52**
Physical fitness	na	–	na	–	na	–	na	–	na	.47*	na	–	na	–

Note: na = not applicable – endorsement < 30 for this domain. Only those analyses for which $n > 30$ are shown.
*$p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; ***$p < .001$.

Table 3
Spearman correlations for overall Work and Life value success ratings with burnout and wellbeing.

| Domain | Maslach burnout inventory (MBI) | | | | Psychological well-being (PWB) | | |
	MBI total	EE	DP	PA	PWB total	Positive relations	Self-acceptance
Work value success	−.41**	−.38**	−.17	.33**	.33**	.24**	.18
Life value success	−.29**	−.23*	−.17	.26	.26**	.19	.25*

Note: EE = emotional exhaustion; DP = depersonalisation; PA = personal accomplishment.
* $p < .05$.
** $p < .01$.

Table 4

Summary of regression analyses for burnout and psychological wellbeing with successful pursuit of work and life values.

	Adj R^2	F	Standardised β	Variance explained (%)
Burnout total (MBI)	.196	12.54**		
Success in work values			−.43**	11.2
Success in life values			−.05	.2
Emotional exhaustion (EE)	.145	8.99**		
Success in work values			−.38*	9.1
Success in life values			−.03	.1
Personal accomplishment (PA)	.085	5.44**		
Success in work values			.28	4.7
Success in life values			.07	.3
Psychological wellbeing (PWB)	.107	6.77**		
Success in work values			.25**	6.3
Success in life values			.14	1.3

Note: MBI – Maslach burnout inventory; PWB – psychological well-being scales.

  * $p < .05$.
  ** $p < .01$.

work values was controlled for, successful pursuit of life values became nonsignificant. Thus, successful pursuit of work values more reliably predicted burnout and wellbeing than successful pursuit of life values.

3.5. Value congruence, wellbeing and burnout

Congruence between work values and life values was determined by calculating a 'value consistency' index, based on the number of values that appeared in both domains. Thus, an index of 0 indicated no congruence, while an index of 15 indicated complete congruence (every life value was the same as every work value). The mean value consistency index was 6.99 ($SD = 2.21$), indicating moderate levels of congruence between work and life values. Correlations were found between value consistency and PWB Total ($r = .25$, $p < .05$), and this effect was most reliable for the self-acceptance subscale ($r = .24$, $p < .05$). Higher value consistency was also associated with higher ratings on the personal accomplishment subscale of MBI ($r = −.23$, $p < .05$). These findings support the importance of congruence between personal and work related values to employee wellbeing and a sense of accomplishment, an aspect of burnout.

4. Discussion

The study explored important work and life values amongst mental health professionals, and the correlates of congruence between work and life values. We examined the relationship of important values and values success with burnout and psychological wellbeing.

A moderate degree of congruence was found between work and life values, and congruence was associated with self-acceptance and perceived personal accomplishment at work. The results resonate with the finding of Harzer and Ruch (2012), that people who experience their job as a "calling" utilise more of their signature character strengths and report more positive experiences at work. While past research has found that a mismatch between values and the organisational environment is associated with poor wellbeing (Sagiv & Schwartz, 2000), this study focused on mismatches within the person between their values for life in general and their work values.

Honesty stood out as the most highly endorsed and actively pursued value of this group of workers. This heartening finding

may reflect increasingly open and authentic communication between mental health workers and their clients. Valuing of honesty amongst nursing students increased significantly from 1983 to 2007, driven by improved attitudes regarding patient empowerment (Johnson, Haigh, & Yates-Bolton, 2007). Our findings also duplicate those of Rassin (2008), who found honesty to be the top personal value amongst hospital nursing staff. Honesty is one of three important values in the multidimensional construct of distrust (Shea et al., 2008), which can lead individuals to fail to seek and maintain appropriate health care (Bova et al., 2012). Our findings reflect well on this group of workers, as the mental health recovery movement promotes collaborative approaches to mental health and rehabilitation, requiring openness and genuine relationships between worker and client.

Those who placed a high value on honesty reported lower burnout. Successful striving towards honesty, whether in one's personal life or at work, was associated with lower burnout and higher wellbeing. Mental health professionals are often required to regulate emotional expression with clients, termed 'emotional labour' (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1989). If low success with honesty is associated with fewer displays of genuine emotion, then our result fits with studies showing those who display phony emotions ('surface acting') are more likely to experience depersonalisation than those who try to genuinely feel expected emotions ('deep acting') (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002). Genuine relationships may limit emotional exhaustion and lead to feelings of accomplishment. *Acceptance of others*, the second most highly endorsed value over the two domains, and *helping others* also reflect personal values that are important work values in the helping professions. Accepting others as they are provides a firm foundation to build an honest, genuine relationship between mental health worker and client. Practitioners who held these values appeared to be less susceptible to burnout.

Mental health staff benefited from having clearly defined work. This is perhaps a particular challenge when working in this field. Service users often have persistent mental illnesses (e.g. schizophrenia) requiring long-term support- and change can be slow with frequent setbacks. The needs of these clients are diverse and may include practical assistance and support, for example, to utilise public transport, through to development of emotion regulation skills. Diverse needs and fluctuating, nonlinear progress carries the risk that mental health workers may at times be unclear about the specific work that is required to help clients. This can imbue a sense of helplessness in workers and their clients. Moreover, the current movement towards recovery-oriented care demands a broader and more collaborative approach to mental health care than the traditional clinical approach of safety and symptom reduction (Slade, Amering, & Oades, 2008). Clear aims and structured approaches to collaborative goal setting and planning with clients may therefore promote wellbeing in staff, by more clearly defining pathways to work goals (Snyder, Lehman, Kluck, & Monsson, 2006). Perceived accomplishment and competence, the most frequently endorsed work-related values, were associated with lower burnout. Understanding these important work values will assist organisations in clarifying expectations and preparing their workforce for work with this service user group. By also providing clear and well-defined ways of working, the probability of burnout is likely to be reduced.

Successful pursuit of work values, rather than life values, was found to be more important in predicting burnout, especially in the areas of emotional exhaustion and personal accomplishment. This suggests successful pursuit of work values may act as a buffer to burnout, and highlights the importance of meaningful work, independent of the home environment (Michaelson, 2009). Unexpectedly, successful pursuit of general life values was not found to contribute uniquely to psychological wellbeing over and above

success with work values. Success in the most frequently endorsed values overall, *honesty* and *acceptance of others* was rated highly in both domains. It is possible that the role of life values in predicting psychological wellbeing is obscured due to these shared values and/or due to the central role work plays in one's life. Alternatively, these findings may be a consequence of the work-related research context. Encouraging people to reflect on their intrinsic values can lead them to prioritise personally meaningful values, resulting in increased well-being (Lekes, Hope, Gouveia, Koestner, & Philippe, 2012). Values clarification tasks have been shown to promote resilience and performance (Creswell et al., 2005) and higher academic achievement (Cohen, Garcia, Apfel, & Master, 2006), and values identification has been used in addressing self-defeating behaviours by increasing engagement in valued activities (Magidson, Roberts, Collado-Rodriguez, & Lejuez, 2014). Values clarification aimed at helping people align their core values with their work may enhance motivation and wellbeing, and reduce the risk of burnout. Conversely, it may provide an opportunity to identify and address a mismatch between personal values and work values. Such mismatches could be addressed by defining any conflicts clearly and by asking employees to contemplate a possible overarching value in the scope of which the conflicting values fall. It is also possible that the decreased engagement and depleted energy which can occur in those suffering emotional exhaustion (Leiter & Maslach, 2000) may lead to a decreased desire or ability to take actions consistent with important values. Thus, worker's with very high emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation may benefit from learning additional strategies aimed at increasing psychological flexibility (e.g. cognitive defusion and mindfulness) prior to completing values clarification exercises (Lloyd et al., 2013).

These results also highlight the importance of valued action as a focus for intervention for wellbeing and burnout. Interventions must focus on assisting people to both connect with what they value, but also address actual value implementation on a day to day basis in the workplace, such as linking specific work goals with personally relevant values (Oishi, Schimmack, Diener, & Suh, 1998).

4.1. Strengths and limitations

The results are specific to mental health practitioners, limiting generalisability to other professions. Also, our focus on correlational analyses limits the extent to which causal direction can be determined: higher wellbeing and lower burnout may enhance successful pursuit of values or vice versa. A strength of the study is that it did not pre-define the set of values for work and life. Instead, using the SGP Card Sorting Task (Ciarrochi & Bailey, 2008), participants engaged in two sorts of a broad set of values, from which congruence between the two domains could be determined. However, this measure did not allow for elaboration of the meaning of some of the value domains. For example, although wisdom may be valued, this tells us little about the meaning of wisdom to an individual in a particular context. Future research could include a qualitative component to explore and elaborate such meaning.

4.2. Conclusions

It was found that this group of mental health practitioners endorsed values consistent with the commonly-shared values of caring professions, both in their lives generally, and in their work. Honesty in life and in work stood out as the most highly-endorsed value, and success at this value was related in the expected ways to all aspects of wellbeing and burnout, reflecting the benefits of genuine relationships with clients in the helping professions.

Avoidant values did not figure highly amongst this group of people, who can sometimes work in quite confronting and challenging situations. The findings indicated that this workforce would benefit from a structured approach in their work with clients. Clarification of work expectations, addressing mismatching personal life and work values, and addressing the nonlinear progress of service users may guide subjective appraisal of professional accomplishments, thereby promoting staff well-being and reducing burnout. Future research could investigate these relationships using objective measures. Congruence between life values and personal work-related values was related to higher wellbeing and lower staff burnout. The use of values clarification tasks and linking values to behavioural actions in professional development may help workers to recognise how their personal values align with their professional work, strengthening the sense of meaning in their work with clients and thereby increasing resilience and promoting wellbeing.

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