Pathological personality as predictor of work engagement, job satisfaction, and burnout in a community sample

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Abstract

The aim of the study was to verify the predictive capacity of the indicator of pathological personality (IPP) regarding work engagement, job satisfaction, and burnout. A total of 228 Brazilian workers answered the IDCP-SV, EEGT, EST, and MBI-HSS. Structural Equation Modeling was used to predict work engagement, job satisfaction, and burnout using the IPP. The results showed that the IPP can negatively predict work engagement and job satisfaction, and positively predict burnout. We observed that workers with high levels of pathological personality functioning are less engaged and satisfied with work and present higher levels of burnout, as hypothesized in this study. The findings indicate the importance of evaluating personality traits, especially pathological traits, in hiring processes and in promoting well-being at work.

Indicador de personalidade patológica como preditor do engajamento, satisfação no trabalho e burnout em uma amostra da população geral

Resumo

O objetivo do estudo foi verificar a capacidade preditiva do indicador de personalidade patológica (IPP) sobre engajamento no trabalho, satisfação com o trabalho e *burnout*. Participaram 228 trabalhadores brasileiros, os quais responderam o IDCP-SV, o EEGT, a EST e o MBI-HSS. Foi utilizada a Modelagem de Equações Estruturais para predição do engajamento no trabalho, satisfação com o trabalho e *burnout* pelo IPP. Os resultados demonstraram que o IPP é capaz de predizer negativamente o engajamento no trabalho e a satisfação com o trabalho, e positivamente o *burnout*. Foi observado que trabalhadores com níveis elevados de funcionamento patológico de personalidade são menos engajados e satisfeitos com o trabalho e apresentam maiores níveis de *burnout*, tal qual hipotetizado. Os achados indicam a importância de se realizar avaliações de traços da personalidade, em especial os patológicos, em processos de contratação de funcionários e para a promoção de bem-estar no trabalho.

Indicador de personalidad patológica como predictor del compromiso laboral, satisfacción laboral y agotamiento en una muestra comunitaria

Resumen

El objetivo del estudio fue verificar la capacidad predictiva del indicador de personalidad patológica (IPP) en el compromiso laboral, la satisfacción laboral y el agotamiento. Un total de 228 trabajadores brasileños respondieron a IDCP-SV, EEGT, EST y MBI-HSS. El IPP utilizó el modelo de ecuación estructural para predecir el compromiso laboral, la satisfacción laboral y el agotamiento. Los resultados mostraron que el IPP puede predecir negativamente el compromiso laboral y la satisfacción laboral, y predecir positivamente el agotamiento. Observamos que los trabajadores con altos niveles de funcionamiento patológico de la personalidad están menos comprometidos y satisfechos con el trabajo y presentan niveles más altos de agotamiento, como se presume en este estudio. Los hallazgos indican la importancia de evaluar los rasgos de personalidad, especialmente los rasgos patológicos, en los procesos de contratación y en la promoción del bienestar en el trabajo.

Due to increasing demands in the workplace related to requirements imposed on employees, and the importance employees have assumed in organizations, there is a concern of employers to provide favorable conditions to promote greater well-being at work (Couto & Paschoal, 2017; Paschoal, Torres, & Porto, 2010; Sant'anna, Paschoal, & Gosendo, 2012). Salanova, Del Líbano, Llorens and Schaufeli (2014) proposed a taxonomy for well-being at work, represented in a circumflex model divided by two orthogonal axes. The horizontal axis refers to the intensity of pleasure and the vertical the amount of energy of the workers in the activities performed. Within this model are allocated four psychological constructs that are directly related to well-being in the work proposed by these authors, being they work engagement, job satisfaction, burnout and workaholic. At the positive pole of pleasure are situated the work engagement and job satisfaction and in the negative pole, burnout and workaholic. The positive energy pole is represented by work engagement and workaholic while negative is represented by burnout and job satisfaction.

Work engagement can be understood as the level of identification that the subject possesses with the activity performed (Siqueira & Padovam, 2008). It is a positive motivational construct in which subjects experience high levels of energy, enthusiasm and motivation resulting in greater commitment and execution of the function exercised (Bakker, Demerouti, Hakanen, & Xanthopoulou, 2007; Cavalcante, Siqueira, & Kuniyoshi, 2014). People with high levels of work engagement tend to perform better (Alessandri, Borgogni, Schaufeli, Caprara, & Consiglio, 2015) and higher rates of well-being and job satisfaction (Cavalcante et al., 2014).

Job satisfaction can be conceived as being of cognitive or affective nature and is linked to the degree of contentment of the individual in the work, with colleagues, bosses, salaries, values, expectations with work and organization (Cavalcante et al., 2014; Mueller & McCloskey, 1990). It is related to the work affectivity, which is directly linked to the objectives and expectations of the subject and the results obtained (Rech & Trindade, 2015). Studies suggest that job satisfaction is positively related to production and commitment indexes (Folami, Asare, Kwesiga, & Bline, 2014; Sánchez-Sellero, Sánchez-Sellero, Cruz-González, & Sánchez-Sellero, 2014), and impacts directly in the individual well-being in diverse areas of live, including work environment (C. A. Silva & Ferreira, 2012; Traldi & Demo, 2012).

Burnout is based on a social-psychological perspective that considers it as a psychological response to stress from workplace stimuli (Gil-Monte, Carlotto, & Câmara, 2011; Maslach & Goldberg, 1998). This perspective conceives burnout as a three-dimensional construct, namely, emotional exhaustion that refers to resource depletion; depersonalization, referring to the lack of sensitivity to others; and low professional achievement, i.e., the negative evaluation tendency when performance in organizations (Carlotto & Câmara, 2004; Maslach & Goldberg, 1998). Studies point to the negative relation between work well-being and burnout. In other words, the higher the levels of burnout, higher the worker's well-being (Hall, Johnson, Watt, Tsipa, & O'Connor, 2016; Salanova et al., 2014).

On the associations between work engagement, job satisfaction and burnout, research demonstrates that burnout is negatively related to job satisfaction and work engagement (Hakanen & Schaufeli, 2012; Khamisa, Oldenburg, Peltzer, & Ilic, 2015; Taris, Ybema, & van Beek, 2017; Upadyaya, Vartiainen, & Salmela-Aro, 2016), while job satisfaction and work engagement are positively related to each

other (Ferreira et al., 2016; Karanika-Murray, Duncan, Pontes, & Griffiths, 2015; Warr & Inceoglu, 2012).

Previous evidences indicated associations of these work-related constructs with pathological traits, impacting on work well-being. People with borderline personality disorder (Caruana et al., 2017) as well as individuals high in neuroticism (Dalanhol, Freitas, Machado, Hutz, & Vazquez, 2017) tend to have lower rates of work engagement. Subjects with schizotypal, avoidant and borderline personality traits are negatively related to job satisfaction and positively to burnout (Bianchi, Rolland, & Salgado, 2018; Wille, De Fruyt, & De Clercq, 2013). In addition, positive relationships between narcissistic personality traits and burnout have been reported (Schwarzkopf et al., 2016).

Given the relationships indicated in the literature on pathological personality traits and work engagement, job satisfaction and burnout, the present study aims to verify the predictive capacity of a pathological trait indicator (namely, indicator of pathological personality; IPP) on work engagement, job satisfaction and burnout. As a previous step, we investigated evidences of validity based on the internal structure (i.e., factorial structure, intercorrelations, and internal consistency reliability) of the measures administered. This step was adopted as the psychometric suitability of the measures is a required assumption. The following hypotheses were tested: (h1) factorial structure of the measures should present good fit indexes, factorial loadings ≥ .30, and α ≥ .70 (Carlotto & Câmara, 2004; Carvalho, Pianowski, & Reis, 2017; Siqueira, 2008; Siqueira, Martins, Orenga, & Souza, 2014); (h2) work engagement should positively correlate with job satisfaction, showing moderate to strong effects, and both negatively with low to moderate effects with burnout (Ferreira et al., 2016; Hakanen & Schaufeli, 2012; Karanika-Murray et al., 2015; Khamisa et al., 2015; Melani, Queirós, Cameira, Vara, & Galvão, 2015; Salanova et al., 2014; M. Silva, Queirós, Cameira, Vara, & Galvão, 2015; Taris et al., 2017; Upadyaya et al., 2016; Warr & Inceoglu, 2012); (h3) IPP should negatively predict work engagement (Caruana et al., 2017; Dalanhol et al., 2017); (h4) IPP should negatively predict job satisfaction (Kim et al., 2017; Wille et al., 2013); (h5) IPP should positively predict burnout (Bianchi et al., 2018; Schwarzkopf et al., 2016; Kim et al., 2017; Wille et al., 2013).

Methods

Participants

This is a cross-sectional study, conducted in Brazil. A total of 228 participants were included, with age between 18 and 64 years old (M = 31.5; *SD* = 9.83), mainly women (60.1%), and White (69.3%). Regarding educational level, 30.3% finished high school, 32.5% were college students, and 26.3% finished higher education. 31.1% reported working or internship in the administrative sector, 24.1% are handwork, and 18% work in commerce and service. 19.3% reported to be working less than 1 year, 31.1% between 1 and 5 years, 25.4% between 5 and 10 years, 14% between 10 and 20 years, and 10.1% more than 20 years. Moreover, 24.1% related to work up to 30 hours a week, 24.6% up to 40 hours, and 51.3% more than 40 hours. Most related to work in matutinal period.

Measures

Dimensional Clinical Personality Inventory – Screening Version (IDCP-SV; Carvalho et al., 2017). The IDCP-SV was developed based on the full version of IDCP (Carvalho & Primi, 2015), a test for the measurement of pathological personality traits. The instrument consists of 15 items arranged in a 4-point Likert scale,

where 1 stands for "nothing to do with me" and 4, "everything to do with me.". Example of items are "I spend my life worrying about one thing or another." e "I have little interest in making friends.". For this study we did not use the dichotomous variable from IDCP-SV, but the scalar variable as an indicator of pathological personality (IPP), where the higher the score, more indicative of pathological functioning. Previous studies showed suitable psychometric properties of the IDCP-SV (Carvalho et al., 2017; Carvalho, 2017).

Work Engagement Scale (EEGT; Siqueira et al., 2014). EEGT is a self-report scale that aims to assess the level of engagement at work. It consists of 10 items scored on a Likert scale from 1 to 5 where 1 refers to "never" and 5 "always". These items represent two factors each with five items, Vigor that refers to beliefs about work stimulating in the individual feelings of disposition, energy, strength (e.g., "Full of energy"); Absorption which consists of beliefs that work can provide concentration and focus on the subject while performing tasks (e.g., "Focused on what I'm doing"). Previous studies investigated its psychometric properties (Siqueira et al., 2014).

Job Satisfaction Scale (EST; Siqueira, 2008). EST is a multidimensional measure aimed to evaluating the level of worker satisfaction in some aspects of the work environment, and the higher the overall score, the more satisfied are the subjects in the dimensions. It is a self-report instrument that contains 25 items, with Likert scale scores of 1 to 7, where 1 corresponds to "totally unsatisfied" and 7 "totally satisfied". These items represent five factors, namely Boss Satisfaction that refers to contentment with organization and ability of the boss (e.g., "With the understanding between me and my boss"); Colleagues Satisfaction, respecting to contentment with collaboration, friendship, trust, and relationship with co-workers (e.g., "With the collaborative spirit of my co-workers"); Salary Satisfaction regarding how much the subject receives with how much work, cost of living and with efforts in accomplishing the task (e.g., "With a salary compared to how much I work"); Job Promotion Satisfaction related to the number of times the person has received promotions, with the company's way of conducting promotions (e.g., "With the number of times I've been promoted in this company"); Nature Work Satisfaction respects the contentment with the work tasks, including the difficulties and challenges of work (e.g., "With the degree of interest my tasks arouse me"). Previous studies investigated psychometric properties of the EST (Siqueira, 2008).

Maslach Burnout Inventory - Human Services Survey (MBI-HSS; Tamayo, 1997). MBI-HSS is self-report scale developed by Maslach and Jackson (1986) to evaluate burnout rates. This scale is composed by 22 items and each item has a scoring system given on a 5-point Likert scale, being 1 "never" and 5 "daily". The MIB-HSS items are divided into three factors, Emotional Exhaustion, characterized by lack of energy and feeling of exhaustion (e.g., "I feel frustrated with my work"); Professional Achievement which refers to the worker's tendency to self-evaluate positively, with a sense of satisfaction with his or her professional development (e.g., "I feel that I can easily create a pleasant environment in my work."); Despersonalization, relate to treat people as objects, emotional insensitivity (e.g., "I feel like I've gotten tougher with people since I started this job."; Carlotto & Câmara, 2004). Both, original and Brazilian version presented suitable psychometric properties (Carlotto & Câmara, 2004; Maslach & Jackson, 1986).

Data Collection Procedures and Ethical Considerations

The research was approved by a Committee of Ethics in Research (CAAE: 84826118.0.0000.5514). People from the community sample were recruited via online social networks, and the administration were online using Google Forms. All participants received detailed information concerning the aims of the study and signed an informed consent to use the data.

Data Analysis Procedures

Descriptive statistics were investigated, as well as inferential analyses seeking to test the predictive model proposed. Analyzes were proceed through SPSS 21 and MPlus 7. We tested the model under the perspective of the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). Considering the ordinal level of the variables, the WLSMV estimator was used, which uses polychromatic correlation matrix. For the estimation of latent variables, we conducted a Confirmatory Factor Analysis using all items. Internal consistency reliability of the measures was verified (alpha). The IPP was determined as the only independent variable of the model. As dependent variables we used the factors of engagement at work (Absorption, Vigor), job satisfaction (Nature Work, Promotion, Salary, Colleagues, Boss), and burnout (Depersonalization, Professional Achievement, Emotional Exhaustion). This model allows the verification of the common variance of the items that are explained by the latent variable; In addition, the relationship between the constructs is based on latent variables, which are more robust because they use only the commonality between items. In order to verify the model fit, the following indexes were used: chi-square and degrees of freedom ratio (X^2 / df <2), Confirmatory Fit Index (CFI; > .90), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA; <.05) (Hu & Bentler, 1999). For the interpretation of the correlation coefficients (r) we used the criteria of Cohen (1992): $r \geq .10$ (weak), $r \geq .30$ (moderate), and $r \geq .50$ (strong). The model tested in the study is presented in Figure 1.
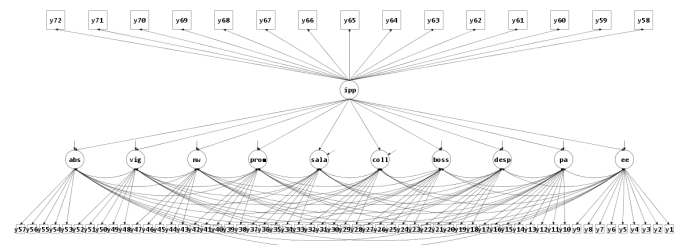

Figure 1. SEM model tested.

Results

We first verified the psychometric properties of the scales, as well as the intercorrelations of dependent variables (i.e., Absorption, Vigor, Nature Work, Promotion, Salary, Colleagues, Boss, Depersonalization, Professional Achievement, Emotional Exhaustion). Means and standard deviations of items, and factorial loadings and internal consistency reliability of factors are presented in Table 1.

Factor item loads were above .30 in almost all cases, except for the item "I feel that I deal very effectively with the problems of the people I have to attend", from the Professional Achievement factor, with a load equal to .27. The reliability coefficients were > .70 in all cases, as well as the model fit indices were satisfactory (X^2/df = 1.37; CFI = .94; TLI = .93; RMSEA = .04). These findings suggest validity evidences based on internal structure and satisfactory internal consistency reliability, therefore not implying biases related to psychometric issues.

Table 1
Descriptive statistics, factorial loadings, alpha, and factorial correlations.

	M (SD)	Δλ	abs	vig	nw	prom	sala	coll	boss	desp	pa	ee
abs	3.65 (.67)	.35~.87	.72									
vig	3.36 (.80)	.76~.85	**.64**	.87								
nw	4.52 (1.10)	.69~.81	**.44**	**.65**	.83							
prom	3.85 (1.32)	.79~.88	**.21**	**.47**	**.80**	.92						
sala	3.74 (1.40)	.77~.93	.09	**.33**	**.69**	**.79**	.92					
coll	4.89 (.99)	.72~.80	**.22**	**.34**	**.61**	**.56**	**.42**	.84				
boss	4.53 (1.36)	.81~.89	**.18**	**.44**	**.70**	**.69**	**.52**	**.52**	.91			
desp	2.22 (.89)	.55~.84	.01	-.11	-.13	**-.15**	-.04	-.08	**-.18**	.75		
pa	3.68 (.72)	.27~.82	**.49**	**.62**	**.48**	**.32**	.17	**.24**	**.24**	**-.41**	.79	
ee	3.03 (.82)	.54~.87	**-.19**	**-.48**	**-.54**	**-.31**	**-.33**	**-.25**	**-.42**	**.44**	**-.28**	.87

Note. Significant values are bolded (*p* < 0,05); Cronbach´s alpha presented diagonally; abs = Absorption; vig = Vigor; nw = Nature Work; prom = Promotion; sala = Salary; coll = Colleagues; boss = Boss; desp = Depersonalization; pa = Professional Achievement; ee = Emotional Exhaustion; Δλ = factorial loadings range.

Correlation coefficients showed a positive correlation for the engagement at work factors, especially Vigor, with the factors of job satisfaction, generally presenting moderate effects. We highlight the strong positive correlation between Vigor and Nature work. The only non-significant correlation was between Absorption and Salary. Significant correlations were observed between the two work engagement SEM factors (Vigor and Absorption) with Professional Achievement (positive) and Emotional Exhaustion (negative) related to burnout, standing out the strong positive correlation between Vigor and Professional Achievement. The correlations between job satisfaction and burnout factors were positive with the Professional Achievement factor and negative with the others. Emphasis is given to the strong negative correlation between Emotional Exhaustion and Nature Work.

Complementary, the descriptive and psychometric indicators of the IPP were verified. The mean was equal to 2.09 (*SD* = .49), and factorial loadings ranged from .18 to .84, with one item ("I usually do things I don´t like to help others.") showing load < .30 (i.e., .18). However, the IPP reliability was .81, suggesting suitable internal consistency among its items. Figure 2 shows the IPP regressions in the dependent variables of work engagement, job satisfaction and burnout.

In Figure 2 the IPP was a significant and negative predictor of the two factors of work engagement. Only two job satisfaction factors, Nature Work and Colleagues, were predicted negatively and significantly. IPP was a positive predictor of the Depersonalization and Emotional exhaustion factors, and negative of the Professional Achievement factor. As for the variables explained variance, burnout measures were the most explained by the independent variable, followed by work engagement measures and job satisfaction measures. Findings suggested that people presenting high scores in the IPP tend also to have low work engagement and job satisfaction (nature work and work colleagues), and high levels of burnout.

Discussion

In this study we investigated the predictive capacity of the IPP on the work engagement, job satisfaction and burnout in a Brazilian worker sample. As an assumption to testing the model, we first verified the internal structure of the measures, as a validity indicator. Findings corroborated the five hypotheses of the study, including (h1) good fit indexes, factorial loadings > .30 and α > .70 (Carlotto & Câmara, 2004; Carvalho et al., 2017; Siqueira, 2008; Siqueira, Martins, Orenga, Souza, 2014); (h2) associations between dependent variables (Ferreira et al., 2016; Hakanen & Schaufeli, 2012; Karanika-Murray et al., 2015; Khamisa et al., 2015; Melani et al., 2015; Salanova et al., 2014; Taris et al., 2017; Upadyaya et al., 2016; Warr & Inceoglu, 2012), as well as the predictive capacity of the IPP on (negative) work engagement and job satisfaction and (positive) on burnout (Bianchi et al., 2018; Kim et al., 2017; Schwarzkopf et al., 2016; Wille et al., 2013). Results are detailed discussed in the next paragraphs.

The Confirmatory factor analysis replied the original structures of the measures, according to previous studies (Carlotto & Câmara, 2004; Carvalho et al., 2017; Siqueira, 2008; Siqueira et al., 2014). Moreover, internal consistency through Cronbach´s alpha was always above .70, which is acceptable (Darren & Mallery, 1999), and corroborates h1. These findings support the inferences elaborated in this study, as the internal structure of the measures administered meets their respective theories, suggesting validity evidences based on the internal structure (American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, National Council on Measurement in Education, 2014).

Work engagement and job satisfaction were positively inter-correlated, and were negatively associated with burnout, confirm our h2. These findings are in line with previous empirical evidences, including positive associations between work engagement and job
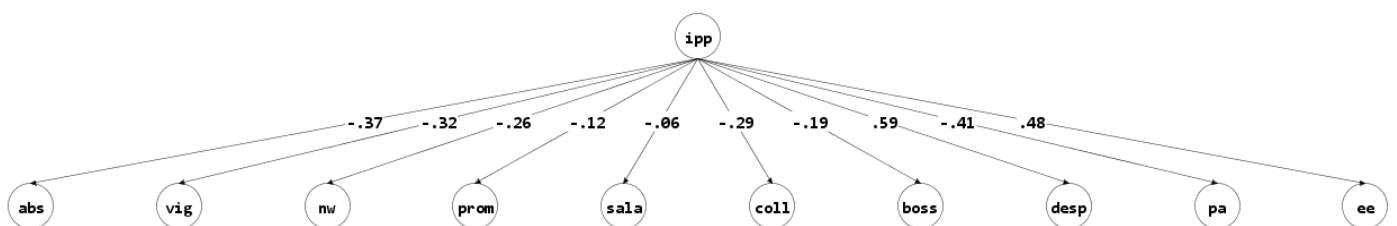

Figure 2. IPP SEM in the work engagement, job satisfaction and burnout measures. *Note.* The items that represented the model were suppressed for the presentation of the results. Except Promotion, Salary, and Boss, the regression was significant (*p* < 0,05) for all cases. Variance explained: Absorption (r^2 = .13; *p* = .01), Vigor (r^2 = .10; *p* = .01), Nature Work (r^2 = .07; *p* = .04), Promotion (r^2 = .01; *p* = .40), Salary (r^2 = .01; *p* = .64), Colleagues (r^2 = .08; *p* = .02), Boss (r^2 = .04; *p* = .13), Depersonalization (r^2 = .35; *p* = .01), Professional Achievement (r^2 = .17; *p* = .01), Emotional exhaustion (r^2 = .23; *p* = .01); IPP = indicator of pathological personality; abs = Absorption; vig = Vigor; nw = Nature Work; prom = Promotion; sala = Salary; coll = Colleagues; boss = Boss; desp = Depersonalization; pa = Professional Achievement; ee = Emotional Exhaustion.

satisfaction (Ferreira et al., 2016; Karanika et al., 2015; Warr, & Inceoglu, 2012), and negative association of these constructs with burnout (Hakanen & Schaufeli, 2012; Khamisa et al., 2015; M. Silva et al., 2015; Taris et al., 2017; Upadyaya et al., 2016). Therefore, in practical terms, we can conclude that workers who are most satisfied with the different components of the work environment (e.g. colleagues, nature of work) tend to be more engaged in performing work tasks. In addition, professionals with higher levels of satisfaction and engagement are less vulnerable to manifesting high levels of burnout.

The IPP was a negative predictor on the two work engagement factors, showing similar standardized effects in the regression model, as expected in the h3. Previous studies related similar findings. For instance, Dalanhol et al. (2017) identified that mental health aspects, mainly, vital energy and psychosocial maladjustment and depression facets from Neuroticism as negative predictors of the work engagement. Caruana et al. (2017) related that people with borderline personality disorder tended to show lack of work engagement. From a daily work perspective, these results suggest that workers with higher levels of pathological personality functioning have more difficulties at work engagement, which can have negative consequences for both the employer (e.g., low productivity) and the worker (e.g., difficulty staying on the job).

Corroborating our h4, the predictive capacity of IPP on job satisfaction was significant and negative in two factors, Nature Work Satisfaction and Colleagues Satisfaction. Similar, previous studies found associations between pathological traits and low levels of job satisfaction (Kim et al., 2017; Wille et al., 2013). Our findings indicate that people with high levels in the IPP tend to report less job satisfaction, mostly respecting the relationship with colleagues and the required tasks at work.

Regarding burnout factors, the IPP was able to positively predict the depersonalization and emotional exhaustion factors, and negatively predict the professional achievement factor, confirm the h5. These results are in line with studies that investigated associations between personality traits and burnout (Bianchi et al., 2018; Kim et al., 2017; Schwarzkopf et al., 2016; Wille et al., 2013). These findings indicate that people showing high scores on IPP are more prone to present high levels of burnout, highlighting the relevance in considering personality traits as a risk factor to burnout.

In general, we observed that workers with high levels of pathological personality functioning are less engaged and less satisfied in the work, and tend to present high levels of burnout. These findings confirm the preoccupation of employers regarding the workers well-being (Couto & Paschoal, 2017; Paschoal et al., 2010; Sant'anna et al., 2012), particularly considering that well-being is positively related with the job performance (Shimazu, Schaufeli, Kamiyama, & Kawakami, 2015). Our results indicate the importance in considering personality assessment, including pathological traits, in employee hiring processes or in programs to prevent and promote well-being at work. Higher levels of pathological personality functioning are known to be detrimental to various aspects of a subject's life (e.g., interpersonal relationships, substance abuse, and life expectancy). According to the findings of this study, we can conclude that, in addition to the aspects previously mentioned, the personality pathological functioning is associated with the increase in probability of factors as damage to people's professional life, reduction in productivity, less job satisfaction, impact on company's general environment, and increasing the occurrence of work-related psychopathologies, such as burnout. These results indicate that pathological personality functioning should also be considered in various work environment scenarios.

Limitations of this study must be accounted. Although we found suitable psychometric properties for the measures, in two cases (i.e., IDCP-SV and MBI-HSS) not all items showed factorial loadings above .30. Future studies should verify if the factorial structure of these measures systematically present these limitations, specially using larger samples. The predictive model proposed in this study considerate a unique independent variable, therefore, not controlling for effects from other eligible independent variables. Furthermore, we did not considerate the workaholic variable in this study, although previous findings suggested it as a relevant variable for work well-being models (Salanova et al., 2014). Future studies should investigate the predictive capacity of the IPP in burnout and workaholic variables, using job satisfaction and work engagement as mediating variables.

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