## Effects of Burnout on an Organisation's Quality Service Provision: Lessons From Non Governmental Organisation Responding to Emergencies in Midlands Region of Zimbabwe.

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Abstract: This paper investigated the effects of burnout on quality service provision in Midlands Region of Zimbabwe. Using Christian Care as the case study the focal point of the paper was on assessing if burnout has any negative impact on the services offered by the organisation. The sample was made up of 25 participants drawn from both support staff and field staff purposively sampled. Data were generated through interviews and open ended questionnaires. Research ethics were observed through getting permission to carry out the research from the selected NGO and obtaining informed consent from the sampled participants. Grounded theory was used for data analysis and research findings revealed that burnout has a negative impact on employees, organisation and on quality service provision. However if policy on burnout is put in place the effects will be reduced thus enhancing quality service provision. It is recommended that human resources department should take seriously the issue of putting in place policy on burnout so that negative impact of burnout on service provision, employees and organisation are dealt with.

Keywords: Non-Governmental Organization, Burnout and Zimbabwe

#### I. Background

To date, there is no agreed single definition of the concept burnout which is the reason why there are several definitions of burnout. Starrin, Larsson and Styrborne, (1990:84) pointed out that "it is possibly easier to agree on a common description of burnout than a common definition of it." Most of the definitions were formulated in such a way that it becomes a catch all expression. These expressions include various conditions and symptoms of burnout covering from physical, mental, emotional and spiritual. According to Kjellerup (2011) burnout means "no more to give, no energy left and no hope of change in my current situation" while Edelwich and Brodsky (1980:166) in Beemsterboer and Baum (1984) define burnout as "a progressive loss of idealism, energy and purpose experienced by people in the helping professions as a result of their work conditions". These definitions indicate that when burnout manifest itself there will be shortage of the internal body energy, sense of hopelessness and negative feeling towards service recipients. This means due to reduction in energy levels employees feel exhausted, frustrated, loss of interest in one's clients and tasks, reduced performance and finally burnout (Maslach and leiter, 1997).

Maslach and Jackson's (1986) tripartite definition of burnout is the most widely accepted in which they used three key expressions emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and reduced personal accomplishment to describe burnout. Maslach and Jackson (1986 cited in Schaufeli et al, 1993:20) defined burnout as;

"a psychological syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who workwith other people in some capacity".

Where emotional exhaustion denotes emotional emptiness due to being overextended emotionally resulting in loss of emotional resources (Schaufeli and Dierendonck, 1993). Depersonalisation refers to negative attitude to one's clients or one' services recipients and reduced personal accomplishment signifying inefficaciousness resulting in decline in one's achievements and work performance (Marin, Campayo, Mera, and Hoyo, 2009). Powell (2011) takes the debate further and pointed out that burnout is a multi faceted phenomena that occurs when there is lack of energy in the body caused by different factors such as irrational think and overworking.

The absence of a clear definition of burnout is a hindrance in trying to understand the burnout concept and its effects on quality service provision for many organisations and even researchers (Hobfol and Shirom, 2000). Maslach and Schaufeli, (1993) indicate that if measures are not put in place to combat burnout in time, it can have long-term cognitive, physical and emotional damage on employees. Farber (2000) states that burnout is not just a "hot topic"; but more than that because its occurrence is associated with health problems amongst millions of human service employees. Hence world wide the concept of burnout has raised great interest in work environment, particularly in organisations that offer human services (Kulkarni, 2006). Many research studies were carried out in Europe and America on effects of burnout on quality service provision, employees and organisation. Research findings indicate that burnout can affect service provision (Halbesleben and

Buckley, 2004). In developing countries and in particular Africa the burnout issue has not been given the attention it deserves as has been the case in the international scene (Chitura and Chitura, 2014)

In Africa very few documented research studies were carried out on effects of burnout amongst human service professionals. According to (Chitura and Chitura, 2014) in countries such as South Africa some studied that were documented focused on burnout among nurses and other human service professions. Unfortunately there is very little research that was done on effects of burnout on NGO employees who respond to emergencies and disasters which leave this area needing further investigations to a certain the effects of burnout on NGO employees responding to emergency and disasters for quality service provision to prevail. However in Zimbabwe studies carried out by Mutambara and Hungwe (2015) at some NGOs in Manicaland indicated that burnout is really a concern for most operational NGOs responding to emergencies and disasters. This tally with findings by Masimira (2002) at one of the local NGO in Midlands which indicated that due to burnout NGO employees find it difficult to have stable social assets. Despite these findings the major gape is that there are no serious studies on effects for burnout on employees and quality service provision.

The purpose of this paper was to examine the effects of burnout on an organisation service provision for the purpose of formulating HR policies that combats burnout so as to induce commitment and loyalty amongst employees which in turn will result in high quality service provision by the organisation. More important this will also in a way make it possible in future for HR department to formulate appropriate and effective HR policy which takes into consideration the effects of burnout on an organisation's quality service provision. In addition the findings will also be helpful in the future development and refinement of existing knowledge on burnout being experienced by thousands of workers across the Midlands Region thus also improving our HR policies. According to Maslack (1993) burnout demotivates workers. More important burnout reduces commitment and wants a worker is not committed the service the employee provides will not be of a good quality which affects the image and market position of the organization. Hence this study seeks to recommend strategies that will harness burnout so as to reduce effects of burnout amongst employees for good service provision since burnout may negatively influence the quality of care provided by human service professionals to care recipients (Maslach and Leiter, 2008).

#### II. The Operating Environment of NGOS in the Midlands Region

The environment of operation was characterised by vulnerable households needing assistance from donor funded emergency programmes where NGO employees were expected to work long house with very little time to rest (Mbohwa, 2009). The environment was also noisy and filled with sounds of vehicles which were often heard in unison with victims moaning noises especially soon after a disaster (Simango, 2007). This kind of condition kept the NGO employees hyper-alert at all times and the noises of suffering victims continued to affect them even after duty or when employees were off duty (McKay, 2007). The NGO (Christian Care) employees were on their toes all the time so that they were able to give emergency assistance at the right second all the time. In disaster situations a split second delay could cost the victims of disaster's life. The activities were fast paced, endless and emotionally demanding.

The paper focused on Christian Care which is one of the local NGOs whose role is to rescue victims of disasters, implementing emergency programmes such as vulnerable group feeding programmes, schools supplementary feeding programmes and counselling.

The situation in Zimbabwe, the country that was once known as southern Africa's "bread basket", food insecurity is now a critical issue for millions of Zimbabweans. A decline in productive labour, climate change, and economic stability has increased rural household vulnerability (Raftopoulos, 2009). The chronic crisis in Zimbabwe is seen as due to a constrained policy environment, economic decline, and increased vulnerability to climatic fluctuations (Chitura and Chitura, 2014). The situation which employees operate in can defeat the logic of any law, policy, procedures and practices causing major challenges to Human Resource Management Department on formulating policies, procedures and practices that reduce burnout so as to motivate workers to provide quality service to the targeted clients (NANGO, 2006). Whilst the assistance brought relief, recovery and a new beginning to the victims of emergencies assistance it was the opposite on the NGO employees for the assistance resulted in emotional overload and finally burnout (McLeod and Henderson 2003).

Cries about the damages causes by burnout have been echoed locally but no appropriate studies were taken to establish effects of burnout and put up strategies that deal with these effects to alleviate the problem of burnout which workers experience. The dilemma is that in Zimbabwe there is little or no effort being made to find out the effects of burnout on quality service provision, employees and organisational image. Hence this study investigates the effects of burnout on an organisation's quality service provision for the purpose of good quality human resource management which results in reduced burnout and quality service provision.

#### Delimitation

The study will only apply to Christian Care Zimbabwe Midlands Region. More important the study was restricted to the areas namely the effects of burnout on quality service provision.

#### The multidimensional model of burnout

There are three major models that are generally used to understand burnout. The three models are the Interactional model, which emphasises the interaction of individual, organisational and societal factors in our endeavour to understand burnout, the Ecology model which is concerned with the interrelationships of organisms and ecosystems and the multidimensional model (Maslach, 1993).

This paper was guided by the multidimensional model in unfolding the effects of burnout on NGO employees responding to emergencies and disasters in Midlands Region of Zimbabwe. This model was selected because of its multi dimensional approach to the problem of burnout. Thus moving away from viewing burnout in a one-dimensional context which tallies with the latest research finding which conceptualise burnout as a multidimensional construct (Perlman and Hartman, 1981; Maslach and leiter, 1997). The Multidimensional theorists such as Maslach and Jackson (1986) developed a three component model of burnout which is widely accepted and used by researchers. The theorist point out that burnout has three components that is emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and reduced personal accomplishment. Emotional exhaustion happens when the body's internal energy is depleted due to prolonged involvement in emotionally demanding situations especially in help professions till the person cannot soldier on. The feeling of emotional exhaustion is more affective and psychological in nature than physical (Hobfoll and Shirom, (2000). Depersonalisation can be described as having negative attitudes towards vulnerable people who depend on one's service or loss of idealism and irritability (Maslach, 1993). Lastly, reduced personal accomplishment is the other component that refers to decrease in one's self-efficacy, competence and achievements (Maslach and Leiter, 2008).

The model demonstrates that when exhausted the employees isolate themselves from clients as a way of saving energy (Maslach and leiter, 1997). However, distancing themselves from recipients brings about negative attitudes towards one's recipient which also diminishes the employee's competences and achievements and work and life becomes meaningless. All this has a negative impact on quality service provision.

#### III. Methodology and Design

Qualitative research approach was used in this study. It is a research approach which involves the use of qualitative data such as interviews, documents and participant observation to understand and explain social phenomena (Chisaka, 2013). Thus, it was developed to enable researchers to study social and cultural phenomena (Stake, 2005). I used the qualitative research methodology drawing largely on the case study because of the nature of the research where I sought to investigate the effects of burnout on an organisation's service provision. Patton (2002) defines a case study as an in-depth study of instances of a phenomenon in its natural context and form the participant involved in the phenomenon. The case study therefore enabled an intensive study within a single setting, with the view to obtain in-depth knowledge on the topic being researched (Johnson and Christensen, 2004). The use of a case study made it possible for me to understand causes of burnout through the use of open ended questionnaire and interviews

My target population was Christian Care employees responding to emergencies and disasters in Midlands Region of Zimbabwe. In this study an anticipated total of 60 workers were used as the sampling frame and the study sample was made up of 25 employees purposefully and systematically sampled. I used systematic sampling for selecting questionnaire participants whereby I listed down the names of the target population in alphabetical order and then take every 3<sup>rd</sup> member from the list of 60 employees after obtaining a random starting point. This formed a 33.3% sample. Thus only 33.3% of the total employees responded to questionnaires. However for interviews I used the purposeful sampling technique. In the case of interviews for burnout one member from the HR department and management was interviewed because they were in a better position to give the relevant information I needed since they were police makers and implementers. Three field staff members were also interviewed since field staff were the ones affected by burnout. This resulted in study sample of 25 participants which was 41.6% of the target population. The inclusion criterion that was met by all participants was centred on the following. The employee was supposed to be someone working in the emergency programme such as responding to disasters and vulnerable group feeding.

A combination of interviews and questionnaires were used for generation of data. Thus interviews were administered to a few representative members of the Christian Care. This was done in a way to get deeper insights into effects of burnout. These interviews also provided a multi-perspective understanding of the topic. Thus by not limiting the respondents to a fixed set of answers, it had the potential to reveal multiple attitudes about the topic which brought about a concrete understanding of the topic of burnout. The administration of interviews was also effective as there was 100% response rate with all questions being answered and explored in much depth, as wished by the researcher. However because of the disadvantage of in-depth interview in tending

to take more time, only a few constituent representatives were interviewed with the rest of the participants contacted through open ended questionnaires.

The open ended questionnaires were administered to 20 field workers implementing emergency programmes in Midlands Region of Zimbabwe. Part A of the open ended questionnaires asked for demographic data such as sex, work experience and age. Part B of the open ended questionnaires solicited data on effects of burnout on workers responding to emergencies and disasters as well as effects of burnout on quality of services provided by NGO employees. All the open ended questionnaires were hand delivered to 20 field staff members. The purpose of the study and the procedures on how to complete the questionnaire were written on the cover letter that was attached to the open ended questionnaires. I collected the completed open ended questionnaires after 5 days. Hand delivery and collection of open ended questionnaires resulted in high response rate (20/20) 100%.

# IV. The Effects Causes of Burnout on Quality Service Provision in the Non Governmental Organisation Sector in the Midlands Region.

This section of the paper presents the profiles of the participants, analysis of data and interpretation of the research findings. The section also discusses effects of burnout on quality service provision before giving conclusions and recommendations.

#### **Demographic Data**

The study sample was made up of 25 participants and 10 of the participants were females while 15 were males. In total 20 field staff members responded to questionnaires. Of the 20 field staff members 7 were females and 13 were males. In addition 5 employees (2 from management and 3 from field staff) were interviewed. The management team that was interviewed was made of 1 female and 1 male. Participants' ages ranged from 25 to 51 years. Participant's work experience ranged from 9 months to 5 years. The academic qualifications of participants ranged from diplomas to masters degree with 7 out of 25 having diplomas, 13 out of 25 having first degrees in social sciences and 5 out of 25 having masters' degrees.

#### V. Findings

This part of the research study deals with the findings focusing on definition of burnout, effects of burnout on service provision, conclusions and recommendations.

#### **Definition of Burnout**

Participants defined burnout as long term emotional exhaustion caused by expending too much time at work without having enough time to rest. For some of the participants burnout is characterised by excessive tiredness, irritability, reduced self-esteem negativity and pessimism due to overworking. Some of the participants who were interviewed said:

Burnout happens when there is no energy left in the body for one to continue working

Represents shortage of internal resources needed for someone to execute his or her duties due to overworking with very little time to rest

Feeling exhausted, irritated and having negative attitude towards self and recipients due to pressure of work.

Constituted by loss of internal energy, feeling tired and incompetent

This is in agreement with Katja (2010) who pointed out that burnout occurrence is due to energy deficit in the human body which is an indication that NGO employees in the emergency sector at Christian Care know burnout.

#### VI. Effects of Burnout

On effects of burnout on Christian Care (NGO) employees who implement emergency programmes, all open ended questionnaire participants argued that due to burnout they experienced reduced achievements and self-esteem, absenteeism, decreased work commitment and professionalism which resulted in employees offering poor services to the targeted vulnerable people. This was also supported by the participants who were interviewed 5 out of 5 who cited burnout as a phenomenon that can affect professionalism, service quality, work ability and performance. This is in line with Ehrenreich's (2006:6) position who indicates that;

Organisational effectiveness can be affected by stress and burnout since

burnout affects not only personal morale and individual performance,

but also the quality of service offered by the organisation.

Taking the debate further Powell (2011:1) points out that;

Employees feel increasingly cynical about the value of their work and actively start to ignore positive aspects of the job....employees feel much less effective

in their job, and performance decreases.

This shows that when employees are affected by burnout work also suffers resulting in poor service provision by NGO employees who respond to emergencies and disasters.

#### Absenteeism,

On how absenteeism affects quality service provision participants pointed out that due to burnout employees end up on sick leave, absent from duty and absconding which in most cases affect service provision. The following statement summed it all:

One day our workmate who was supposed to distribute food to victims of floods did not turn up because of a severe headache. The beneficiaries had to go back home walking a distance of 15km empty handed and hungry which was really disheartening and disrespecting of the dignity of the beneficiaries.

The participants highlighted that such incidents were many and really affected the quality of service offered by the organisation. This blends well with Tracy's (2006) suggestions were the researcher argued that absenteeism affects effectiveness and efficiency of the organisation which in turn tarnish the image of the organisation. Participants highlighted that at times they rescue victims of disasters with very few staff members because some of the employees will have gone on sick leave or just abscond complaining of health problems such as backaches, headaches and high blood pressure which seriously affects quality of services they offered to the vulnerable people. These supporting statements were extracted from the interviews:

Emergency programme beneficiaries at times question our reliability because due to absenteeism occasioned by burnout we demobilise them and give them food at a later date which affects beneficiaries because they will go for days without food.

At times where we are supposed to spend 1 hour assisting beneficiaries we end up spending 4 hours because some of our workmates will have gone on sick leave on a very short notice due to health problems linked to burnout.

#### **Professionalism**

Participants indicated that when executing their duties they are supposed to observe humanitarian code of conduct especially the Code of Conduct and principles of the International Rescue Committee (IRC) to ensure that services offered in emergency situations are of high quality. However participants highlighted that, due to burnout employees ended up involved in misdemeanours such as sexual abuse of beneficiaries and misuse of resources earmarked for people who needed emergency assistance which has a negative impact on their profession and quality of work they offer to beneficiaries. Some of these statements bear testimony:

At times we are involved in behaviours that harm beneficiaries sexually and psychologically when some of our workmates enter into illegal sexual relationship with beneficiaries.

Unbecoming behaviour of employees affects planning, decision making and quality of service offered to beneficiaries.

At times burnout forces us to rely on drugs, alcohol and other illegal means which affects the standard of our work and professionalism.

When the employees because of burnout behave in a manner that is against the ethical principles of their profession they cause more harm than good. One of the ethical principles of the IRC reads:

IRC humanitarian workers recognize the inherent unequal power dynamic and the resulting potential for exploitation inherent in humanitarian aid work and that such exploitation undermines the credibility of humanitarian work and severely damages victims of these exploitive acts and their families and communities. For this reason, IRC humanitarian workers are prohibited from engaging in sexual relationships with beneficiaries. Sexual activity with children (persons under the age of 18) is strictly prohibited.

Therefore burnout also results in employees disregarding the humanitarian principles which also affect quality of services that they offer to targeted beneficiaries. This can be costly to the organisation because the donor community may end up not funding organisation whose reputation may be questionable and whose quality of work is not up to the required standard (Ehrenreich, 2006).

#### **Decreased Work Commitment**

On how decreased work commitment affect quality of services provided by their organisation participants pointed out that lack of commitment means employees' level of effort will be very low which

results in the organisation not achieving set targets and also the quality of work will be compromised. The participants highlighted that in some cases they do not care about the dignity of beneficiaries or respecting their rights because they will be in burnout condition. These statements appear to capture the essence:

Burnout affects us to the extent that we feel irritated to assist our beneficiaries which compromise the quality of work we offer.

At times because of burnout we through temper tantrums when assisting beneficiaries which tarnish the image of our organisation and it also affects our work.

Burnout causes us not be caring, loving and hardworking but to be hopeless, uncaring and not committed to anything.

This is also in agreement with Maslach and Leiter (1997) who indicate that burned out workforce is the workforce that is not committed, not trusted which has a negative bearing on the quality of work provided by the NGO. In agreement with this perception Armstrong (2001) points out that employees who are not committed pretend to be working for the organisation whilst they will be offering poor services to recipients. This means that employees who are not committed do not worry about upholding the highest professional standards of accountability and transparency in the delivery of services which are fundamental principles for provision of quality services.

#### **Reduced Performance**

On the effects of reduced performance on quality service provision participants argued that good performance depend largely on the state of the employee's body. If the body is exhausted and has health problems quality work is compromised. The participants pointed out that burnout causes employees to have a negative perception to their work which affects their performance and the quality of services they offered to beneficiaries. They also highlighted that because of burnout employees ended up not motivated to do anything which also affected services they offered to the victims of emergencies and disasters. In support of this argument Major (2012) says burnout reduces your productivity, snaps your energy, leaving you feeling hopeless cynical and resentful which affects negatively the organisation's standards of service provision.

#### VII. Conclusions

It can be concluded that effects of burnout experienced by Christian Care (NGO) employees who respond to emergencies and disasters in Midlands Region of Zimbabwe were reduced achievements and self-esteem, absenteeism, decreased work commitment and professionalism which in turn affects organisation's quality service provision and is costly to the organisation due to cost related to work accidents and absenteeism. Whilst in other countries such as America high staff turnover is regarded as the major effect of burnout in Zimbabwe and in particular Midlands Region due to high rate of unemployment paged at above 80% high staff turnover is not being experienced by the NGO. Employees remain at their work because there is nowhere to go. It can also be concluded that effects of burnout differ in nature and settings, hence intervention strategies should be specific and appropriate to the targeted group. Lastly effects of burnout should be established first before any intervention strategy is put in place.

#### VIII. Recommendations

It is recommended that models that deal with effects of burnout NGO employees responding to emergencies and disasters experience in Midlands Region of Zimbabwe should be put in place as a temporary measure before dealing with burnout. This will thwart abuse of beneficiaries and also protect the image of the organisation. I also recommend that effects of burnout should be given serious attention and should be harnessed in time before they cause serious damage to life and organisations. It is very important to realise that doing the same work for long time can result in redundancy and career platueing which in turn causes burnout. Hence I recommend that the NGO (Christian Care) should motivate employees through strategies such as making work meaningful through job rotation where employees rotate from emergency sector to recovery or development sector where activities are not fast paced. This will allow the employees from emergency sector to rest and replenish. This will thwart absenteeism, unprofessionalism and lack of commitment caused by burnout. I recommend that the NGO should also make their reward management policy effective through increasing types of incentives they offer. Incentives such as flexible schedules, tickets to special events or concerts, training and professional development other than financial rewards can induce commitment which in turn results in high quality service provision.

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