**Sense of meaning moderates the association between stress and well-being in social workers during Covid-19**

**Abstract**

Social workers are at the front line of responding to the coronavirus pandemic, which has placed an enormous strain on their health and well-being. Using the theoretical framework of the job demands-resources model, the present study focuses on the role of sense of meaning and professional self-esteem in the association between the job demands and resources and well-being among social workers who worked during the Covid-19 pandemic. A sample of 478 Israeli social workers from variety of social work fields completed an online questionnaire. The multiple regression model showed that 45.8% of the variance in well-being was accounted for perceived stress, social support, professional self-esteem and sense of meaning being. Lower level of perceived stress and higher levels of social support, professional self-esteem and sense of meaning significantly predicted increased well-being. Sense of meaning significantly moderates the association perceived stress and well-being. Findings are discussed is respect to future research and social work practice.

**Introduction**

Across the globe, nations find themselves in lockdown in order to fight the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19), with social workers are at the front line of responding to the pandemic. It has become increasingly notable that if any profession is most hurt by the pandemic, it is the social work profession (Amadasun, 2020; Golightley & Holloway, 2020). The COVID-19 crisis has swept social workers into a difficult and painful reality that requires dealing with the significance of the crisis on a personal and professional level. In addition, the COVID-19 crisis has led to a break in the continuum of personal and professional routines when social workers are required to adapt and innovate to meet new needs and reprioritize the most urgent and important aspects of their roles (Banks et al., 2020). In the midst of the crisis, social workers are experiencing a shared traumatic reality with their clients, and within it face the multiple challenges that the epidemic brings with it.

Similar to their clients, the impact of COVID-19 may be devastating for social workers. Within essential services, many social workers are putting themselves, and their loved ones, at risk of infection as they continue to perform their work with clients and organizations (Abrams & Dettlaff, 2020; Guerrero et al., 2020). Since social work is more vital than ever, and as such, social workers’ experiences on the frontlines of the pandemic warrant deep attention.

The COVID-19 pandemic has placed an enormous strain on health care workers, and its potential impact has implications for the physical and emotional well-being of the work force (Ripp et al., 2020). However, research on psychological outcomes among social workers received limited attention at this point. The strain and its association to the well-being of social workers who work during Covid-19 is unclear and this study aim to address this lacuna. Using the theoretical framework of the job demands-resources model, the present study focuses on the role of sense of meaning and professional self-esteem in the association between the job demands and resources and well-being among social workers who worked during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Well-being is a construct expressing general or specific life satisfaction across various domains, including standard of living, health, achievement in life, relationships, safety, community connectedness, and future security (Lau, Cummins, & Mcpherson 2005; Diener et al. 2009). Well-being is not only linked to personal stress but is also responsive to existing social and economic resources (Cummins 2000; 2002; 2005), that may serve as moderating variables on the association between stress and well-being (Cummins 2012a, 2012b).

To examine the association between stress and well-being among social worker, based on their organizational and personal demands and resources, the job demands-resources model was chosen as the theoretical framework for this study.

***The Theoretical Framework of the Job Demands-Resources Model***

The theoretical framework of the job demands-resources model outlines the processes through which job demands and resources influence occupational health, organisational behaviour, and job performance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2018). At the heart of the job demands-resources model lies the assumption that, whereas every occupation may have its own specific risk factors associated with job stress, these factors can be classified into two general categories (i.e., job demands and job resources) (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017), thus constituting an overarching model that may be applied to various occupational settings, irrespective of the particular demands and resources involved (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, 2014). Job demands refer to those physical, psychological, social, or organisational aspects of the job that require sustained physical and/or psychological (cognitive and emotional) effort or skills and are therefore associated with certain physiological and/or psychological costs. Although job demands are not necessarily negative, they may turn into job stressors when meeting those demands requires the expending of high effort from which the employee does not adequately recover. Job resources refer to those physical, psychological, social, or organisational aspects of the job that in some combination are: functional in achieving work goals; reduce job demands and the associated physiological and psychological costs; and stimulate personal growth, learning, and development. Hence, resources are not only necessary to deal with job demands, they also are important in their own right (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, 2018; Demerouti et al., 2001).

A second premise of the job demands-resources model is that two different underlying psychological processes play a role in the development of job strain and motivation. In the first, a health impairment process, poorly designed jobs or chronic job demands (e.g. work overload, emotional demands) exhaust employees’ mental and physical resources and may lead to an overall depletion of energy (i.e., a state of exhaustion or burnout). The second process proposed by the job demands-resources model is motivational in nature. According to the motivational process, the availability of job resources leads to organisational commitment and work engagement (Bakker et al., 2004; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, 2018; Demerouti et al., 2001; Tims et al., 2013).

Although an extensive research was conducted on the impact of work engagement, there are few studies on how social workers find meaning in their workplace or the workplace factors that influence their perceptions of meaningfulness (Tan, Lew, & Sim, 2020). It is for these reasons that scholars such as Steger (2017) have advocated that organizations should move “beyond engagement and commitment and strive for meaningful work” (p. 60).

Studying the concept of meaning of work among social worker goes alone the notion that the role social workers perform carries a special meaning (Tan, Lew, & Sim, 2020), As with the notion that the importance of work to people's lives goes beyond the financial means to survival, rather it is integral to a person's identity, serves as a source of belonging and meaning (Hu & Hirsh, 2017; Shea-van Fossen & Vredenburgh, 2014).

***The role of professional self-esteem and sense of meaning***

There is a shortage of research that examines the role of personal resources and there is a need for a better understanding of their role in the job demands-resources model (Tremblay & Messervey, 2011). In this study, we focus on professional self-esteem and sense of meaning as buffers against the negative consequences of stress in social workers in time of national crisis.

Professional self-esteem is the workers personal definition of their professional efficacy, worth, and functioning, shifting between positive and negative dimensions (Carmel, 1997). Research indicated the potential power of professional self-esteem as a resource that gives helping-professionals the strength to deal with stressful events (Finzi-Dottan & Kormosh, 2016) and associated with life satisfaction and well-being (Carmel, 1997). In addition, professional self-esteem found to be a moderator in the association between organization climate and emotional exhaustion and mental distress (Mäkikangas & Kinnunen, 2003).

***Conceptualizing Meaning of Work***

The concept of meaning of work structures a variety of definitions, reflecting a complex and multi-dimensional construct (Steger et al., 2012; Lips-Wiersma and Wright, 2012). Common to them all is the idea that meaning of work refers to a subjective experience that has a personal meaning for the individual ([Rosso et al., 2010](https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2016.00704/full#B52)). Within the various definitions reference is also made to people’s subjective experience that their work is purposeful and significant, it is synergistic with the meaning and purpose in their broader context of life, it is aligned with their own personal values and beliefs, and that their work has personal and social importance (Hu & Hirsh, 2017; Nawrin, 2018; Schnell, Höge & Pollet, 2013; Steger, 2017). Tracing the origin of research of meaningful work leads to the existentialist view of Dr. Frankl, (Frankl, 2006). Since his work, researchers are striving to explore further on the impact meaning has on the different surfaces of one's life. Within these works, meaning in work has gained popularity over recent years (Both-Nwabuwe, Dijkstra & Beersma, 2017; Tan, Lew, & Sim, 2020; Van Wingerden and Van der Stoep, 2018). Yet, to the best of our knowledge, no study has traced the sense of meaning of work during a period of ongoing threat, such as the current period.

The concept of ‘meaning in work’ is used interchangeably with ‘meaningful work’, ‘meaningfulness of work’, ‘meaning of work’ and ‘work meaningfulness/values’. This leads to theoretical ambiguity (Lee, 2015).

***Meaning in work and work outcomes***

Previous studies revealed that meaningful work reveals positive corollaries on both, personal and work outcomes, such as higher job satisfaction (Allan et al., 2018), enhanced well-being and overall life satisfaction (Allan et al., 2016; Hu & Hirsh, 2017), a better sense of self-esteem and improved sense of self-efficacy (Allan et al., 2018; Steger et al., 2013; Yildrim and Naktiyok, 2017). In contrast, Increased perceptions of meaningful work were also strongly negatively related to stress (Hu & Hirsh, 2017).

***Study's aim***

In line with Demand and resources theory, and the increasingly interested in the potential benefits of perceiving work as meaningful, the aim of this study is to apply the job demands-resources model to subjective well-being among social workers who worked during the Covid-19 pandemic. Demand and resources included perceived stress, social support, job insecurity, organizational support, job stress, role ambiguity, and job satisfaction.

More specifically, in this study, we examine whether sense of meaning and professional self-esteem moderate the association between demands and resources and well-being. Based on our conceptual model, it is hypothesised that demands and resources will interact with sense of meaning and professional self-esteem to predict well-being, i.e., the association between demands and resources and well-being is dependent on the level of sense of meaning and professional self-esteem.

**Method**

***Participants***

A purposive sampling was used to select the research participants. The participant criteria for this study was that the social workers worked during the Covid-19 pandemic crisis. A convenience sample of 478 social workers who worked during the Covid-19 pandemic crisis participated in the study. Convenience sampling is a type of non-random sampling where members of the target population that meet certain practical criteria, such as availability at a given time or the willingness to participate, are included (Etikan et al., 2016). In addition, a snowball sampling was used.

Their mean age was 39.53 (SD=8.73), ranging from 25 to 68 years of age. The majority were women (81.1%). The large proportion of females in the cohort is compatible with gender differences in the social work profession in Israel (Knesset Information and Research Center, 2015). The majority (78.70%) were Jewish, and the rest were Muslims (13.40%), Christians (4.40%), and Druze (0.60%).

Participants education level was B.A. (38.90%), M.A. (53.10%) and PhD (0.60%). About half of the sample (51.50%) were working less than full time, 28% were working full time and 20.50% were working more than full time. Seniorityat workranged from 1 to 35 years with a mean score of 8.60 (SD=6.94). Experience in social work as a profession ranged between 1 to 42 years, with a mean score of 12 years of experience (*SD*=7.95). Table 1 present the social work fields of the sample.

Table 1.

*Social work fields distribution*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| *(%)* | *n* | Social work fields |
| 8.60 | 40 | Social services departments |
| 3.70 | 17 | Community |
| 13.10 | 85 | Children and youth |
| 10.30 | 48 | Disabilities |
| 4.70 | 22 | Aging |
| 12.50 | 58 | Mental health |
| 13.10 | 61 | Correction |
| 6.5 | 30 | Addictions |
| 16.4 | 76 | Domestic violence |
| 2.80 | 13 | Health |
| 3.00 | 14 | Trauma and loss |

***Measures***

*Well-being*

Well-being was assed using the Mental Health Continuum-Short Form (Keyes et al., 2008), that conceptualizes well-being as includes the presence of positive feelings (emotional well-being) and positive functioning in individual life (psychological well-being) and community life (social well-being) (Lamers et al., 2011). The scale comprises 14 items, representing various feelings of well-being. Respondents rate the frequency of every feeling in the past month on a 5-point Likert scale. Items were translated into Hebrew by Shrira et al. (2016). The scale shown good psychometric properties (Lamers et al., 2011). In the current study, the scale showed excellent internal reliability (Cronbach’s *α* = .85).

*Perceived stress*

Perceived stress was assessed by three items from the Perceived Stress Scale, which is the most widely used psychological instrument for measuring the perception of stress. It is a measure of the degree to which situations in one’s life are appraised as stressful (Cohen et al., 1983, 1994). This questionnaire consists of 10 items on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (“never”) to 4 (“very often”). This scale was chosen because it is an easy-to-use questionnaire with established acceptable psychometric properties (Lee, 2012), including the Hebrew version (Ganz et al., 2019). In the current study, the scale showed excellent internal reliability (Cronbach’s *α* = .83).

*Workload*

Workload was assessed by two items from the Questionnaire on the Experience and Evaluation of Work (Veldhoven et al., 2002). Respondents are asked to choose the most appropriate response on a 5-point scale (very strongly disagree to very strongly agree). The scale demonstrated good internal consistency (Harmsen et al., 2019). In the current study, the scale showed adequate internal reliability (Cronbach’s *α* = .74).

*Sense of Meaning in Work*

Sense of meaning in work was measured by two items from the sense of meaning in work scale that was developed by Oren (2005). Responses rated on a 5-point Likert scale (very strongly disagree to very strongly agree). Oren (2005) reported a good internal consistency; Cronbach’s *α* of .82*.* In the current study, the scale showed adequate internal reliability (Cronbach’s *α* = .68).

*Professional self-esteem*

Professional self-esteem was assessed using three items from The Professional Self-Esteem Scale (Carmel, 1997). The questionnaire includes eight items (e.g., “Generally, I’m sure that my professional knowledge and skills are on a very high level”) assessing professional self-esteem. Each item is rated on a 5-point scale ranging between 1 (not true) to 5 (very true). The higher the item average, the higher is the worker’s self-esteem. Previous study reported alpha coefficient reliability of .88 (Finzi-Dottan & Kormosh, 2016). In the current study, the scale showed good internal reliability (Cronbach’s *α* = .80).

*Role Ambiguity*

Role ambiguity was measured by three items from the Role Ambiguity scale (Rizzo et al., 1970), which is the most widely used role stressor measure (Bowling et al., 2017). Participants were asked to indicate their agreement with the three items that measure the degree of role ambiguity on the job. Responses were made along a six-point Likert scale. A composite role ambiguity score was calculated by averaging the responses. High scores indicate higher levels of role ambiguity. In the current study, the scale showed good internal reliability (Cronbach’s *α* = .80).

*Job insecurity*

Job insecurity is conceptualized as the subjectively perceived and undesired possibility to lose the present job in the future, as well as the fear or worries related to this possibility of job loss (Elst et al., 2014). Job insecurity was measured using two items from the Job Insecurity Scale, a scale originally developed by De Witte (2000). Respondents were asked to rate these items on a 5-point Likert type scale, ranging from 1 (‘‘strongly disagree’’) to 5 (‘‘strongly agree’’). The job insecurity scale can is considered as valid and reliable instruments to measure job insecurity (Elst et al., 2014). In the current study, the scale showed adequate internal reliability (Cronbach’s *α* = .65).

*Perceived Organisational Support*

A three item shortened version of the Survey of Perceived Organisational Support (Eisenberger et al., 1986) was used to measure perceived organisational support. Response options ranged from (1) `strongly disagree' to (5) `strongly agree.' Worley et al. (2009) reported excellent reliability and in the current study, the scale showed also good internal reliability (Cronbach’s *α* = .81).

*Perceived social support*

Perceived social support was measured by the four items from the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (Zimet et al., 1988). It measures perceived social support from family, friends, and a significant other. The scale is a subjectively completed brief instrument consisting of a total of 12 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale (very strongly disagree to very strongly agree), with higher scores reflective of greater perceived social support. The scale showed good internal reliability, and the factor analysis confirmed the subscale structure of the measure (Dahlem et al., 1991). In the current study, the scale showed excellent internal reliability (Cronbach’s *α* = .94).

*Job Satisfaction*

Job satisfaction was measured by the three items from the Michigan Organisational Assessment Questionnaire Job Satisfaction Subscale (Cammann et al., 1979). Scores are computed using the average of the following three items: ‘‘All in all I am satisfied with my job", ‘‘In general, I don’t like my job” (reversed-scored), and ‘‘In general, I like working here.” Responses were rated on a seven point agree–disagree scale. A meta-analytic examination of the construct validity of job satisfaction subscale indicated that it is a reliable and construct-valid measure of job satisfaction (Bowling & Hammond, 2008). In the current study, the scale showed internal reliability of .77 (Cronbach’s *α*).

***Background Characteristics***

Socio-demographic characteristics and work-related characteristics were assessed. Socio-demographic characteristics included gender, age, religious, religiosity level (secular, traditional, religious), and education level. Work-related characteristics included seniority at work and employment level (part time, full time and more than full time).

***Procedure***

All measures were completed through an online survey using Qualtrics software. The study was approved by the institutional review board of the School of Social Work at Bar Ilan University. Participants were recruited through social media and through professional instant messaging groups. Due to this process, the response rate is unavailable.

Participants were given vital information on the course of the study. It was emphasized that participation was voluntary and that participants had the right to withdraw from the study without penalty at any stage. Participants were assured that all measures would be taken to protect their anonymity and confidentiality. All the participants signed informed consent forms online. No compensation was given to the interviewees for participation in the study.

***Statistical Analysis***

Descriptive statistics were used to depict the participants’ demographic characteristics, as well as the research variables. Pearson correlations were used to assess the associations between the research variables: Well-being, perceived stress, social support, sense of meaning, professional self-esteem, job insecurity, organizational support, workload, role ambiguity, and job satisfaction. Multiple regression analysis was conducted to explain well-being based on job demands and resource, sense of meaning and professional self-esteem. These analyses were performed using SPSS software (25th version). A regression-based path analysis was employed to directly test the proposed moderation model using PROCESS software (Hayes 2012). Model 1 in PROCESS was estimated with 1,000 bootstrap samples and 95% bias-corrected bootstrap confidence intervals for all indirect effects. To address missing data, a Little’s MCAR test was employed and indicated that approximately 1% of the data was missing and that the data may be assumed to be missing completely at random. Consequently, pairwise deletion was used. Researchers have traditionally used deletion methods to deal with missing elements (Enders 2010). In datasets with multiple variables, it appears that pairwise deletions may lead to much lesser amounts of data loss than listwise deletions (Kock 2014) and ensures that the statistical power and integrity of the dataset is maintained (Croninger & Douglas 2005). Last, the pairwise deletion approach performs well when the data are missing completely at random (Asparouhov & Muthén 2010).

**Results**

**Associations between demand, resources and well-being**

Table 2 presents the associations between demands, resources sense of meaning, professional self-esteem, and well-being. Well-being correlated with sense of meaning, professional self-esteem and with all demands and resources except for job stress. An increased well-being was associated with decreased perceived stress, job insecurity, role ambiguity and with increased social support, job satisfaction, organizational support, Professional self-esteem and sense of meaning. The strongest associations were between higher levels of social support, professional self-esteem and sense of meaning and increased well-being. Job stress was associated only with perceived stress, but not with other demands and resources and well-being. Interestingly, modest positive associations were found between job stress and professional self-esteem and sense of meaning.

[Table 2 about here]

**A multiple regression model to explain well-being**

The multiple regression model results are summarized in Table X. 45.8 percent of the variance was accounted for by the independent variables [F(8, 472) = 49.07, p < .001], with perceived stress, social support, professional self-esteem and sense of meaning being the only predictors with significant contributions individually. Lower level of perceived stress and higher levels of social support, professional self-esteem and sense of meaning were associated with increased well-being. The strongest predictor of well-being was social support, followed by sense of meaning and professional self-esteem, and perceived stress.

**Moderation Effects of Professional Self-esteem and Sense of Meaning**

The interaction between stress and sense of meaning was significant in predicting well-being (β=0.13, *p* < 0.01). Examination of the interaction plot, presented in figure 1, demonstrates an enhancing effect; in social workers with low and medium sense of meaning, well-being decreases as the stress increases. However, among social workers with high sense of meaning at work, social workers who reported increased stress demonstrated increased well-being that those who reported low and medium stress.

[Figure 1 about here]

Professional self-esteem failed to moderate the association between stress and subjective well-being. In addition, no significant interaction was found between social support and the moderators in predicting well-being.

**Discussion**

Since social workers are at the forefront of the fight against the psychosocial effects of the Corona pandemic, it raised the need to examine how to reduce the damage to their well-being. The aim of this study was to apply the job demands-resources model to well-being among social workers who worked during the Covid-19 pandemic. We used the job demands-resources model as the theoretical framework for this study, because JD-R model provides description of the way demands, resources, psychological states, and outcomes are associated (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014).To the best of our knowledge, a well-established theory for assessing the well-being of workers, based on resources and demands, has not been applied in situations of national / international crisis.

In this study demands included perceived stress, job insecurity, job stress and role ambiguity. Resources included social support, sense of meaning in work, professional self-esteem, organizational support, and job satisfaction. More specifically, we examined whether sense of meaning in work and professional self-esteem moderate the association between demands and resources and well-being. We choose these variables because they hardly researched in this theoretical context and very relevant to the social work profession. An increased well-being was associated with decreased perceived stress, job insecurity, role ambiguity (demands in our study) and with increased social support, job satisfaction, organizational support, professional self-esteem, and sense of meaning in work (resources in our study).

The main findings show that well-being correlated with all demands and resources except for job stress. Increased well-being was associated with lower levels of perceived stress, job insecurity, role ambiguity. In addition, enhanced well-being was connected with higher levels of social support, job satisfaction, organizational support, professional self-esteem and sense of meaning. Our finding supports the assumption of the JD-R Model, that every occupation has its unique demands and resources that affect employee well-being (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Demerouti & Bakker, 2011; Upadyaya *et al*., 2016).

The strongest predictor of well-being was social support, followed by sense of meaning and professional self-esteem, and perceived stress. Well-being is a construct expressing general or specific life satisfaction across various domains ( (Lau, Cummins, & Mcpherson 2005; Diener et al. 2009). We could therefore say that in our study we found that social workers' well-being expressed by social support, job satisfaction, organizational support, professional self-esteem, and sense of meaning in work. These findings reinforce the great importance that work has in our lives as contributing to subjective well-being.

An explanation for the lack of correlation between job stress and well-being, may be relate to the fact that among social workers job stress is a normal and familiar condition, that has no real effect on well-being. Other explanation could relate to interestingly finding of modest positive associations between job stress and professional self-esteem and sense of meaning**.** It is possible that job stress at a certain level produces a sense of professional self-esteem, that stems from the ability to meet the challenge and at the same time produces a sense of meaning in work. Research indicated the potential power of professional self-esteem as a resource that gives helping-professionals the strength to deal with stressful events (Finzi-Dottan & Kormosh, 2016).

The strongest predictor of well-being was social support, followed by sense of meaning in work, professional self-esteem, and perceived stress. Lower level of perceived stress and higher levels of social support, professional self-esteem, and sense of meaning in work were associated with increased well-being.

The finding of social support congruous with the literature argument that well-being response to existing social resources (Cummins 2000; 2002; 2005). Professional self-esteem and sense of meaning in work could also be related to social resources, since the practice of social work has a special social meaning and is an integral part of the identity and sense of commitment to act for the benefit of the society (Hu & Hirsh, 2017; Shea-van Fossen & Vredenburgh, 2014; Tan, Lew, & Sim, 2019).

We could explain the finding that higher level of professional self esteem predict increase in well-being, as research indicated the potential power of professional self-esteem as a resource that gives helping-professionals the strength to deal with stressful events (Finzi-Dottan & Kormosh, 2016), and associated with life satisfaction and well-being (Carmel, 1997).

Sense of Meaning in work as positive predictor of well-being could be explained by its synergistic with the meaning and purpose in broader context of life (Hu & Hirsh, 2017; Nawrin, 2018; Schnell, Höge & Pollet, 2013; Steger, 2017). In addition, previous studies revealed that meaningful work enhanced well-being and overall life satisfaction (Allan et al., 2016; Hu & Hirsh, 2017).

The findings of our study that lower level of perceived stress and higher levels of professional self-esteem and sense of meaning in work, were associated with increased well-being, are in line with previous researches who found that meaningful work could reveal to better sense of self-esteem and improved sense of self efficacy (Allan et al., 2018; Yildrim and Naktiyok, 2017; Steger et al., 2013).

The interaction between perceived stress and sense of meaning was significant in predicting well-being, and the association between perceived stress and well-being was scientifically moderated by sense of meaning. It is matching previous study finding that Increased perceptions of meaningful work were strongly negatively related to stress (Hu & Hirsh, 2017). We can also assume, that social workers necessity in this crisis, increases the sense of meaning of their work and therefore mediates between the perceived stress and well-being.

Professional Self-esteem failed to moderate the association between stress and well-being. This finding can be explained by the fact that high professional self-esteem (was high in our study), that is difficult for the social worker to express in situations of high perceived stress, could cause a decrease in well-being. Studies show that high self-efficacy also has a negative effect on motivation (Vancouver & Kendall, 2006). In addition, the COVID-19 crisis required social workers to adapt and innovate skills required to meet new needs and reprioritize the most urgent and important aspects of their roles (Banks et al., 2020). These challenges could act against reducing the well-being.

The study has theoretical implications. The job demand and resources theory incorporate many possible working conditions and focuses on both negative and positive indicators of employee well-being. However, the theory focuses on organizational factors and should elaborate on personal resources (Demerouti& Bakker, 2011). In this regard, personal factors as sense of meaning and professional self-esteem contribute to the wider theoretical context. Although these two variables are strongly correlated, they act differently in the association between stress and employee's well-being. In addition, there is a scarce research on the job demand and resources theory in the context of national and international crises.

This study and the insights that emerge from it point to directions of action that can contribute to the well-being of social workers in times of crisis. At the academic level, raising awareness of the importance of the social work profession in general and in times of national / international crisis in particular, can promote research and knowledge building that will be used by professionals in similar situations in the future. At the national level, immediate recognition of the vitality of social workers as part of the national emergency system is required, and in particular the emphasis on their critical role in reducing the negative psychosocial consequences of the pandemic. At the professional level, it is necessary to build interventions to reduce the perceived pressure and increase the personal well-being of social workers.

At the public level, it is important to raise the positive image of the social work profession, which will contribute to an increase in the sense of meaning among social workers for their work. It is important because we found that sense of meaning moderate between perceived stress and well-being. Waters et al. (2021) pointed out several positive psychology factors (for example meaning in life and High-quality connections with friends, family and colleagues), that can be incorporated into interventions.

Study limitations should be taken into consideration when interpreting the results. These limitations include the disclosure of sensitive personal information by participants about their feelings and perceptions of their workplace. These revelations may involve social desirability bias, i.e., the tendency to under-report socially undesirable behaviours or information and to over-report more desirable attributes (Kelly et al., 2017). In addition, because the participants were recruited via an online survey link, the sample was not randomly selected, and thus a sampling bias risk exists. Other limitations are connected to the cross-sectional approach and the shorten version of the measurements that were used. However, the shorten versions allowed us to collect rich and meaningful data in time of international crisis. In addition, all measurements yielded an adequate internal consistency coefficient.

Future studies can examine factors that promote or prevent a sense of meaning among social workers both at the public level and at the organizational level, since the sense of meaning is very important for increasing well-being in stressful situations. It is also important to examine in length studies, the behaviour and impact of the variables examined in this study that related to well-being.

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