

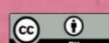
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RICARDO POCINHO, RUI SANTOS, CRISTÓVÃO MARGARIDO, SÍLVIA  
SILVA, SARA GORDO

ISSN 1645-4774 | e-ISSN 2183-038X  
<https://www.eduser.ipb.pt>



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Niveles de burnout, comprometimiento en el trabajo y satisfacción profesional en organizaciones sociales en Portugal

### AUTORES

Ricardo Pocinho<sup>1</sup>, Rui Santos<sup>2</sup>, Cristóvão Margarido<sup>3</sup>, Sílvia Silva<sup>4</sup>, Sara Gordo<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Instituto Politécnico de Leiria - Escola Superior de Educação e Ciências Sociais; Centro Interdisciplinar de Ciências Sociais (CICS.NOVA); Leiria; Portugal; <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1307-5434>; [ricardo.pocinho@ipleiria.pt](mailto:ricardo.pocinho@ipleiria.pt)

<sup>2</sup> Instituto Politécnico de Leiria - Escola Superior de Educação e Ciências Sociais; Centro Interdisciplinar de Ciências Sociais (CICS.NOVA); Leiria; Portugal; ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0473-8497>; [rui.d.santos@ipleiria.pt](mailto:rui.d.santos@ipleiria.pt)

<sup>3</sup> Instituto Politécnico de Leiria - Escola Superior de Educação e Ciências Sociais; Centro Interdisciplinar de Ciências Sociais (CICS.NOVA); Leiria; Portugal; ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2479-5114>; [cristovao.margarido@ipleiria.pt](mailto:cristovao.margarido@ipleiria.pt)

<sup>4</sup> Instituto Politécnico de Leiria - Escola Superior de Educação e Ciências Sociais; Leiria; Portugal; ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4215-2999>; [silvia.c.silva@ipleiria.pt](mailto:silvia.c.silva@ipleiria.pt)

<sup>5</sup> Instituto Politécnico de Leiria - Escola Superior de Saúde; Center for Innovative Care and Health Technology (ciTechCare); ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9578-9520>; [sara.gordo@ipleiria.pt](mailto:sara.gordo@ipleiria.pt)

**ABSTRACT:** Burnout has repercussions on job satisfaction. Therefore, this investigation aimed to analyze the relationship between burnout, work engagement and coping strategies of social workers in Portugal through the evaluation of 339 professionals, across an online questionnaire, regardless of the target population of their services and social responses. The main results demonstrate that professionals who recognize support from their managers, who feel integrated into their teams, who are satisfied with their life and professional roles and consider their physical and mental health to be positive, present lower levels of burnout, higher levels of commitment and use coping strategies to solve problems in their professional context. Higher burnout levels and lower work engagement were observed in professionals working in shifts, particularly in the night shift. Burnout symptoms are evidenced by physical fatigue, followed by cognitive fatigue, and emotional exhaustion. Regarding work engagement, the results obtained demonstrated high levels of professional engagement (78.3%). Working in Social Organizations is highly demanding and challenging. Consequently, there is an urgent need to develop educational programs aimed at training professionals in these settings. Such programs serve as a crucial protective factor against demotivation, thereby preventing emotional and physical exhaustion within the professional sphere.

**KEYWORDS:** Burnout; Engagement to work; Coping strategies; Job satisfaction; Training.

**RESUMO:** O Burnout tem repercussões na satisfação no trabalho. Nesse sentido, esta investigação teve como objetivo analisar a relação entre burnout, comprometimento no trabalho e estratégias de coping dos assistentes sociais em Portugal através da avaliação de 339 profissionais, por meio de um questionário online, independentemente da população-alvo dos seus serviços e das suas respostas sociais. Os principais resultados demonstram que os profissionais que reconhecem o apoio por parte dos seus gestores, que se sentem integrados nas suas equipas, que estão satisfeitos com a sua vida e funções profissionais e que consideram a sua saúde física e mental positiva, apresentam níveis mais baixos de burnout, níveis mais elevados de compromisso e utilizam no seu contexto profissional estratégias de enfrentamento para a resolução de problemas. Maiores níveis de burnout e menor comprometimento no trabalho foram observados nos profissionais que trabalham em turnos, principalmente no noturno. Os sintomas de burnout são evidenciados pela fadiga física, seguida da fadiga cognitiva e da exaustão emocional. Em relação ao comprometimento no trabalho, os resultados obtidos demonstraram elevados níveis de empenho profissional (78,3%). Trabalhar em Organizações Sociais é muito exigente e desafiador. Portanto, há uma necessidade urgente de desenvolver

programas educacionais para capacitar profissionais em Organizações Sociais, considerando que estes atuam como um fator protetor contra a desmotivação, prevenindo o esgotamento emocional e físico em contexto profissional.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Burnout; Comprometimento com o trabalho; Estratégias de *coping*; Satisfação no trabalho; Formação.

**RESUMEN:** El burnout tiene repercusiones en la satisfacción laboral. En este sentido, esta investigación tuvo como objetivo analizar la relación entre burnout, compromiso laboral y estrategias de afrontamiento de los trabajadores sociales en Portugal a través de la evaluación de 339 profesionales, por medio de un cuestionario online, independientemente de la población objetivo de sus servicios y de sus respuestas sociales. Los principales resultados demuestran que los profesionales que reconocen el apoyo de sus directivos, que se sienten integrados en sus equipos, que están satisfechos con su vida y rol profesional y que consideran positiva su salud física y mental, presentan menores niveles de burnout, mayores niveles de compromiso y utilizan estrategias de afrontamiento para resolver problemas en su contexto profesional. Se observaron mayores niveles de burnout y menor compromiso con el trabajo en los profesionales que trabajan por turnos, especialmente nocturnos. Los síntomas de burnout se evidencian por la fatiga física, seguida de la fatiga cognitiva y el agotamiento emocional. En relación con el comprometimiento laboral, los resultados obtenidos demostraron altos niveles de compromiso profesional (78,3%). Trabajar en Organizaciones Sociales es muy exigente y desafiante. Por lo tanto, existe una necesidad urgente de desarrollar programas educativos para formar profesionales de las Organizaciones Sociales, considerando que actúan como un factor protector contra la desmotivación, previniendo el agotamiento emocional y físico en el contexto profesional.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Burnout; Compromiso con el trabajo; Estrategias de afrontamiento; Satisfacción laboral; Capacitación.

## 1. Introduction

Currently, social organizations face enormous changes and challenges, which can positively and negatively change workers' mental and physical health. These impacts can arise from improvements in job tasks due to the provision of personal and health services, as well as from increasing the sources of pressure such as deadlines, adaptation to technologies, and adjustment to task complexity (Brown et al., 2014; Riedl et al., 2012). The stress resulting from the work environment, referred to as work stress or occupational stress, is a concern associated with the industrialized world, including the stressful experiences that take place in professional contexts (Fletcher et al., 2006).

The phenomena of stress and occupational diseases play a worrying role in the labor world, prompting the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, for some years, to promote awareness campaigns aimed at changing a persistent reality haunting European country. According to data from this agency, stress and mental health disorders rank as the most severe health problem in the workplace for approximately one-fifth of the workers in the European Union. Job satisfaction and engagement reflect the way professionals feel in their work contexts. Although they have different definitions, they have been associated with occupational stress due to the lack of coping strategies for problem-solving. Individuals with good levels of job satisfaction show adequate stress levels and an excellent ability to adapt and engage in the work, considering how they deal with stressors (Mota-Cardoso et al., 2002).

Different studies suggest that occupational stress has a negative impact at the individual and organizational levels. The results show poor professional performance, absenteeism, apathy, frequent tardiness, early retirements, difficulties in interpersonal relationships, reduced control of work quality and aggressive behavior at work as manifestations of occupational stress. These manifestations may have organizational impact and lead to Burnout (Cooper et al., 2001; Maslach et al., 2008).

## 2. Burnout, work engagement and job satisfaction

There are different definitions of Burnout in scientific literature, the most consensual and widespread being Malach and Jackson's. The authors defined burnout as a psychological syndrome that emerges in response to chronic interpersonal stressors in the work context. They defended a three-dimensional model

corresponding to the internal dimensions of this syndrome: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment (Maslach et al., 2001).

Emotional exhaustion is a central dimension of burnout, characterized by devitalization, fatigue, and loss of physical and psychological energy. It also encompasses a depletion of emotional resources, characterized by the perception that one has nothing left to offer to others, along with physical and psychological manifestations. In severe cases, individuals may feel that they have reached the limit of their capabilities (Maslach et al., 2008). Exhaustion can lead workers to poor physical and emotional involvement, and although it is the central dimension of burnout, it is considered that exhaustion itself neither translates nor explains the phenomenon of burnout (Maslach et al., 2001; Maslach et al., 2008).

The concept of work engagement emerged from Positive Psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) and has contributed to a shift in the occupational health focus, traditionally oriented towards malaise and illness (Leiter & Maslach, 2016). Attention has turned to the positive aspects, promoting well-being and best functioning of human beings. This turn, coupled with the lack of positive constructs of occupational well-being, led engagement to assume increasing attention in this field of Occupational Health Psychology (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2007). That said, work engagement is still a recent concept, focusing on human strengths rather than on their weaknesses and dysfunctions (Rodrigues & Barroso, 2008).

### **2.1. Occupation of Health in Social Organizations**

The relationship between engagement and burnout in occupation health has been the subject of theoretical and empirical research. The researchers' perspective is not unanimous since there are two prevailing schools or perspectives of thought. Maslach and Leiter (1997) assume that considering well-being at work, engagement and burnout are two opposite poles in a continuous relationship, in which burnout corresponds to the negative pole, and engagement corresponds to the positive pole. Burnout arises when individuals, previously engaged in their work, experience an erosion process in which energy is transformed into exhaustion, participation into cynicism and effectiveness into ineffectiveness. Recently, Maslach et al. (2008) suggested the existence of five latent burnout profiles due to how the subjects manifest this continuous burnout engagement. The burnout profile would imply high values of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, while the engagement profile would correspond to low values in the dimensions of burnout. The exhausted, disengaged, and ineffective profiles apply to high scores, only and respectively, in emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and ineffectiveness. Job satisfaction is one of the most discussed areas in scientific literature within the scope of organizational behavior (Zhu, 2013). It is especially the case for its consequences on workers' health, associated with occupational stress since individuals with good levels of job satisfaction reveal adequate stress levels and good coping strategies (problem-solving) due to stress factors (Mota-Cardoso et al., 2002). There are many definitions of job satisfaction, which led to the need to categorize them according to the dominant theoretical perspective with which they are aligned. In addition, several studies relate it to the variables of burnout, technostress, and engagement (Aldwin & Gilmer, 2004; Armon et al., 2012; Folkman & Greer, 2000; Gomes et al., 2013).

Within this framework, the present study aims to conduct a multidimensional assessment of social organization workers in Portugal, including all professional categories and management positions. It intends to analyze the risk factors for burnout (physical and mental exhaustion) in workers and management position holders. It also aims to show the protective factors that lead to a quality of life for working teams and good engagement and efficiency at work. Ultimately, this study looks to understand the occupational health of social organization workers and teams in Portugal.

To accomplish our aims, the following objectives were established: i) to assess the levels of burnout and job satisfaction of professionals through the evaluation of work engagement and coping strategies (problem-solving); ii) to verify how they vary according to sociodemographic and professional characteristics; iii) to identify the relationship between engagement and burnout and verify whether they constitute opposite extremes of a continuous emotional state.

## **3. Methodology**

The sample consisted of workers from Social Organizations in the Portuguese territory, regardless of their sociodemographic characterization. Study participants should be: i) aged  $\geq 18$  years, ii) workers from social



organizations in Portugal, iii) signed the informed consent form, and iv) able to understand Portuguese. All institutions were included regardless of the target population of their services and social responses. The present study included all professional categories to understand the differentiating impact of burnout on social workers according to various professional roles. The sample was collected in several areas of Portugal. The number of participants in this study was 339 workers from social organizations.

Study participants were given an overview of the aims and characteristics of the study, and informed consent was obtained from all participants before the survey was conducted. An evaluation protocol consisting of two main parts was conducted. The first part consisted of a sociodemographic questionnaire (gender; age; marital status; existence of children; level of education; professional role; professional training frequency; type of institution and service; social response in which they work; number of years of service; type of employment contract) and feelings/ perception of their work (feeling of justice, work motivation, physical and psychological health perception). The second part consisted of an evaluation protocol that applied instruments to assess the professionals' levels of burnout, work engagement, and coping strategies. Participants were asked to answer the questionnaire online or in paper-and-pencil format voluntarily. For this purpose, three instruments confirmed for the Portuguese population were used:

- i) The Maslach and Jackson's Burnout Inventory, developed by Christina Maslach and Susan Jackson (1971), which consists of 22 questions on a Likert scale, ranging from 0 to 6, and identifies the levels of burnout according to the total score: the higher the total scores, the higher the level of burnout;
- ii) The Scale of Commitment to Work (ECT), translated to Portuguese by Simões and Gomes (2012) from the original work by Schaufeli and Bakker (2004), allows accessing the subjects' work engagement profile. The version consists of 17 items answered on a Likert scale, ranging from 0 (never) to 6 (always). Higher values mean higher levels of dedication, which are also associated with high levels of work engagement;
- iii) The Brief Cope, which consists of a 28 items' questionnaire, evaluating the coping strategies and coping styles that the subject uses through a Likert scale, ranging from 0 to 3 (0 - I never do it; 1 - I sometimes do; 2 - I frequently do; 3 - I almost always do) (Carver, 2013). A low score indicates low coping strategies. This instrument results from an earlier and more extensive version of the literature on coping and behavioral self-regulation models (Lazarus & Folkman, 2012).

The questionnaires were available online between January and February 2020 and could be answered during the participants' free time at any location with internet access. Whenever necessary, participants were clarified on all doubts and questions by email. They had online access to the informed consent, and all participants agreed to voluntary participation in the present study. The evaluation protocol provided information about the purpose and implications of the project, as well as the guarantee of confidentiality of the information collected and the voluntary nature of the participation. The program Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, version 20.0) was used for data analysis and statistical treatment. In the present paper, we used mean values and standard deviations to analyze the percentages and frequencies of participants' sociodemographic characteristics and the variables burnout, work engagement and coping strategies. A correlational study was also conducted to verify the correlation between the variables under study (burnout, work engagement and coping strategies) and their hierarchical regression analysis.

### 3. Results

The sample for the present study included 339 workers from social organizations, among whom 21 participants (6.2%) were male, and 318 participants (93.8%) were female. The majority were 35 to 44 years old (47.2%) and were married or in a common-law relationship (59.6%). About education, most of the sample held higher education qualifications (68.1% had completed graduate studies, 17.7% held a master's degree, and 1.2% had obtained a PhD). Geographically, most participants lived in the north of the country (46.6%) and the Centre and Lisbon regions (41.3%). They were distributed evenly between urban (50.1%) and rural areas (49.9%)— additionally, 74.5% of the total sample held leadership positions within the institutions where they were employed.

**Table 1***Frequency Table: sociodemographic characteristics.*

		Frequencies	Percentage
Gender	Female	318	93.8
	Male	21	6.2
Age	18 to 24 years	11	3.2
	25 to 34 years	103	20.4
	35 to 44 years	160	47.2
	45 to 54 years	52	15.3
	Over 55 years	13	3.8
Marital Status	Single	106	31.3
	Married/Common-law	202	59.6
	Divorced	28	8.3
	Widowed	3	0.9
Education	Illiterate	-	-
	1- 4 grades	-	-
	5- 6grades	5	1.5
	7 - 9 grades	7	2.1
	10-12 grades	22	6.5
	Post-secondary education	10	2.9
	Higher studies	231	68.1
	Master's degree	60	17.7
Geographical area	PhD	4	1.2
	North	158	46.6
	Center and Lisboa	140	41.3
	Alentejo	26	7.7
	Algarve	11	3.2
	Madeira	2	0.6
Area of residence	Azores	2	0.6
	Urban	170	50.1
Do you have management functions?	Rural	169	49.9
	No	88	25.5
	Yes	256	74.5

Study participants revealed the presence of burnout, albeit slightly (MD= 58.6; SD=21.06; minimum 12, maximum 120), with high work engagement (MD= 74.1; SD=23.79; minimum 1, maximum 102) and low levels of problem-solving strategies (coping) (MD= 37.2; SD=11.24; minimum 1, maximum 70) (Table 2).

**Table 2***Variable's Mean and standard deviation.*

	MD	SD
Burnout	58.6	21.06
Coping	37.2	11.24
Work Commitment	74.1	23.79

Notes: MD = mean; SD Standard Deviation

There were no differences between the workers who exercised management functions and the others regarding operationalized and analyzed variables.

However, there were differences in terms of whether workers in social organizations work or not in shifts. Thus, those who work in shifts have higher values of burnout and lower values of work engagement and coping strategies. According to the study, the shift with the highest burnout rate is the night shift (MD= 66.47). About the belief that professionals from social organizations had of their physical and psychological health,

workers who considered their health to be good had lower burnout levels (MD=54.9) than those who considered their health to be reasonable (MD=59.3) or bad (MD=68.7). Similarly, professionals who perceived their health as well showed a much greater work engagement (MD=80.2) than those who considered their health reasonable (MD=72.4) and wrong (MD=61). There was also a decrease in coping strategies depending on the belief in physical and psychological health. Those who considered themselves to have good health have higher levels of coping (MD=38.3) compared to those who believe their health to be reasonable (MD=36.8) or bad (MD=34.8). A Spearman correlation was used to analyze the impact of burnout on work engagement or vice versa and how the existence of coping strategies protects employees from developing burnout. The applicability of this test instead of others is related to the characteristics of the construct under analysis since the variable under study is not genuinely continuous but a variable with an interval/ratio using a Likert scale (Table 3).

**Table 3**  
*Analysis of variables.*

	Burnout		Coping Strategies		Work Commitment	
	MD	Min-Max	MD	Min-Max	MD	Min-Max
Management functions?						
Yes	57.48	12-120	37.31	1-70	74.86	1-102
No	60	12-120	37.08	1-70	73.07	1-102
Shifts worker						
Yes	66.47	12-120	32.89	1-70	60.40	1-102
No	57.57	12-120	40.73	1-70	80.42	1-102
How do you perceive your health?						
Good	54.9	12-120	38.3	1-70	80.2	1-102
Reasonable	59.3	12-120	36.8	1-70	72.4	1-102
Bad	68.7	12-120	34.8	1-70	61	1-102

Notes: MD = mean; Min = minimum; max = maximum

Spearman's correlation coefficients showed that Burnout and Coping Strategies are moderately and negatively related ( $r = -.379$ ,  $p < .01$ ). That is, the higher the burnout, the fewer coping strategies there are, and the fewer coping strategies there are, the higher the burnout. Spearman's correlation coefficients demonstrated that Burnout and Work Commitment are weak and positively related ( $r = .265$ ,  $p < .01$ ). The higher the work engagement, the higher the risk of burnout. Spearman's correlation coefficients also demonstrated that Coping strategies and Work engagement are weakly and positively related ( $r = -.153$ ,  $p < .01$ ). That is, the higher the engagement at work, the higher the coping strategy (Table 4).

**Table 4**  
*Correlation analysis between Burnout, Coping and Work Commitment.*

	Burnout	Coping	Work Commitment
Burnout	-	-,379**	,265**
Coping	-,379**	-	,153**
Work Commitment	,265**	,153**	-

Notes: \*\* = The correlation is statistically significant at 0,01 (bilateral).

#### *Study of Burnout Predictions*

According to the data, the first hierarchical regression, the first block without the Coping Strategy variable, explained a statistically significant proportion (2.7%) of the burnout variance [ $R^2 = .027$ ,  $F(1,337) = 9,422$ ,  $p < .05$ ]. With the inclusion of the variable coping strategies in the second block, the proportion of variance explained remains significant and increases to 5.2% [ $R^2 = .052$ ,  $F(2,336) = 9,122$ ,  $p < .05$ ]

#### *Study of predictions of work engagement*

According to the data in the first hierarchical regression, the first block without the Coping Strategy variable explained a statistically significant proportion (2.7%) of the burnout variance [ $R^2 = .027$ ,  $F(1,337) =$

9,422,  $p < .05$ ]. With the inclusion of the burnout variable in the second block, the proportion of explained variance remains significant and increases to 4.3% [ $R^2 = .043$ ,  $F(2,336) = 7.521$ ,  $p < .05$ ].

#### *Study of predictions of coping strategies*

According to the data, in the first hierarchical regression, the first block, without the variable Work engagement, explained a statistically significant proportion (3.2%) of the variance of burnout [ $R^2 = .032$ ,  $F(1,337) = 11,187$ ,  $p < .05$ ]. With the inclusion of the variable work engagement in the second block, the proportion of explained variance remains significant and increases to 4.8% [ $R^2 = .048$ ,  $F(2,336) = 8,415$ ,  $p < .05$ ].

### **5. Concluding remarks**

Work is an indispensable activity for personal and collective development, which forms a source of well-being, on the one hand, and malaise, on the other, with multiple manifestations and vulnerability to psychosocial risks. Social workers, specifically from Social Organizations, constitute a professional group exposed to various adverse factors of different natures, quickly triggering occupational diseases, so it is crucial to have political and social strategies that may prevent psychological and physical wear and tear in this working class. This research aims to contribute to developing burnout prevention strategies and improving job satisfaction. It is intended to analyze the levels of burnout, work engagement, and the existence of coping strategies (problem-solving). It was found that the professionals who feel supported by managers, integrated into their teams, are satisfied with their lives and work functions, and consider their physical and psychological health positive have lower burnout and higher levels of work engagement.

There were no significant differences in coping strategies. Higher burnout levels and lower work engagement were also seen in professionals working in shifts, particularly in the night shift. About sociodemographic characteristics, there were no significant differences in operationalized variables: burnout, work engagement and coping strategies (problem-solving). These results are supported by research data in this field (Chen & Chen, 2012; Green, 1985).

About burnout levels and a partial analysis of its three sides, the physical fatigue dimension was the most prevalent (10.6%), followed by cognitive fatigue (7.8%) and emotional exhaustion (2.8%).

These results confirm the pattern evidenced by data presented in other professions, namely in professionals providing general care and health (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Regarding work engagement, the results obtained demonstrated high levels of professional engagement (78.3%), thus suggesting the existence of feelings of an effective work bond (Lee & Wang, 2012). This result is much higher than that of other studies (Manzano, 2002; Schaufeli & Salanova, 2017). The study of correlations showed that Burnout and Coping Strategies are negatively related (the higher the burnout, the lower the existing coping strategies, and the lower the coping strategy, the higher the burnout). Burnout factors and engagement at work are positively related (the higher the work engagement, the greater the risk of burnout). Coping strategies and work engagement are positively related (the more significant the work engagement, the higher the coping strategy). There were no significant differences in coping strategies. The predictive study revealed that work engagement and coping strategies explain only 5.2% of burnout. Burnout and the coping strategies variable explain only 4.3% of work engagement.

Finally, there is a small percentage of explanation of burnout and work engagement in the variable coping strategy. The regressive study, therefore, shows that the variables are not highly predicted.

Despite the relevance of the results of this study, it is essential to mention the main limitation of this work: the transversal nature of the data collection method, preventing the establishment of causal relationships between the variables.

While the primary aim of this study is not to analyze the causal factors of the relationships, it is recommended, in the future, to employ longitudinal methodologies to understand better the complex and dynamic nature of the interplay between stress and the psychological and cognitive functioning of workers. In summary, this work allowed us to verify the importance of investigating the experience of occupational stress in professionals from social organizations, as well as the importance of cognitive assessment of how professionals respond to the demands of the job.



These results highlight the need for social organizations to carry out constant assessments, adaptations, and evolutions concerning their professionals' skills and abilities. The new challenges focus on the need for specialized professional training, while weaknesses must be rethought, such as motivation, job satisfaction and the possible existence of Burnout (Deci et al., 2017; Silvia, 2003). This need is due, in part, to the rapid pace of technological and scientific development, which has led to constant restructuring in organizations, making training a fundamental foundation for professional qualification and for the success of organizations (Antunes, 2010).

There is an urgent need to develop educational programs to train professionals in social organizations, considering that they act as a protective factor against demotivation and prevent emotional and physical exhaustion in a professional context.

## Contribution

R. POCINHO – Project Administration; Conceptualization; Methodology; Writing – original draft; R. SANTOS – Methodology; Validation; Writing –review and editing; C. MARGARIDO – Formal Analysis, Validation; Writing –review and editing; S. SILVIA – Conceptualization; Investigation; Data Curation; S. GORDO – Conceptualization; Investigation; Data Curation; Validation

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