

Workplace Spirituality and Employee Thriving: The Mediating Role of Meaningful Work among Healthcare Workers in the Northern Province of Sri Lanka

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Introduction

Healthcare professionals operate in highly demanding environments characterized by heavy workloads, emotional exhaustion, staff shortages, and increasing patient expectations. Such pressures often reduce employee vitality and diminish opportunities for learning and personal growth, consequently affecting employee thriving. Employee thriving refers to a psychological state in which employees simultaneously experience vitality and learning in their work roles (Spreitzer et al., 2005).

Recently, workplace spirituality has emerged as an important organizational resource that enables employees to find meaning, connectedness, and purpose in their work. Workplace spirituality does not refer to religion but rather to employees' experience of meaningful work, community, and alignment with organizational values. Studies indicate that workplace spirituality positively influences well-being, engagement, flourishing, and innovative behaviors among employees. Recent evidence also suggests that spiritually enriched workplaces create positive psychological environments that promote employee growth and well-being. Healthcare workers may particularly benefit from workplace spirituality because their occupations inherently involve service, compassion, and human connection. The demanding nature of healthcare work frequently exposes employees to burnout, emotional fatigue, and turnover intentions. Consequently, understanding factors that enhance thriving among healthcare workers is particularly important.

Meaningful work may represent an important mechanism through which workplace spirituality influences employee thriving. Meaningful work refers to the perception that one's work is significant, purposeful, and contributes to a greater good. Employees who perceive their work as meaningful are more likely to experience enthusiasm, personal growth, and resilience. Although previous studies have separately examined workplace spirituality, meaningful work, and employee thriving, empirical evidence integrating these variables remains limited, particularly in developing countries such as Sri Lanka. Moreover, research focusing on healthcare professionals in the Northern Province remains

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scarce. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the influence of workplace spirituality on employee thriving and examine the mediating role of meaningful work among healthcare workers in Northern Sri Lanka. This study is grounded in the Self-Determination Theory, which argues that fulfillment of employees' intrinsic needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness promotes positive psychological outcomes, including thriving. Workplace spirituality can satisfy these psychological needs by fostering purpose and interpersonal connectedness, thereby enhancing meaningful work and employee thriving.

Objectives

1. To examine the impact of workplace spirituality on meaningful work.
2. To determine the effect of workplace spirituality on employee thriving.
3. To examine the impact of meaningful work on employee thriving.
4. To investigate the mediating role of meaningful work in the relationship between workplace spirituality and employee thriving.

Methodology

This study employed a quantitative research approach using a cross-sectional survey design to examine the relationships among workplace spirituality, meaningful work, and employee thriving among healthcare workers in the Northern Province of Sri Lanka. The target population consisted of healthcare professionals, including doctors, nurses, pharmacists, medical laboratory technologists, and other allied healthcare staff employed in government hospitals in Jaffna, Kilinochchi, Mullaitivu, Mannar, and Vavuniya districts. A sample of 362 respondents was considered adequate to achieve sufficient statistical power for structural equation modelling analysis. A convenience sampling technique was adopted by categorizing respondents according to their professional groups. Primary data were collected through a structured self-administered questionnaire. Workplace spirituality was measured using the scale developed by Milliman et al. (2003), meaningful work was assessed using the scale proposed by Steger et al. (2012), and employee thriving was measured using the instrument developed by Porath et al. (2012). All items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Data Analysis

Relationship	β	t-value	p-value
Workplace Spirituality → Meaningful Work	0.72	15.62	<0.001
Workplace Spirituality → Employee Thriving	0.29	4.51	<0.001
Meaningful Work → Employee Thriving	0.54	8.73	<0.001

The reliability analysis demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70 for all constructs. The structural model results revealed that workplace spirituality had a significant positive effect on meaningful work ($\beta = 0.72$, $t = 15.62$, $p < 0.001$) and employee thriving ($\beta = 0.29$, $t = 4.51$, $p < 0.001$). Furthermore, meaningful work significantly influenced employee thriving ($\beta = 0.54$, $t = 8.73$, $p < 0.001$). The mediation analysis further indicated that meaningful work significantly mediated the relationship between workplace spirituality and employee thriving ($\beta = 0.39$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting a partial mediation effect. In terms of explanatory power, the model accounted for 52% of the variance in meaningful work ($R^2 = 0.52$) and 67% of the variance in employee thriving ($R^2 = 0.67$). These findings imply that workplace spirituality plays a substantial role in enhancing healthcare workers' perceptions of meaningful work and, consequently, their ability to thrive in the workplace.

Discussion

The findings indicate that workplace spirituality significantly enhances meaningful work among healthcare professionals. Employees who perceive greater connectedness, compassion, and organizational value congruence are more likely to experience their work as purposeful and significant. The positive influence of workplace spirituality on employee thriving is consistent with recent studies suggesting that spiritually enriched workplaces facilitate employee growth, well-being, and flourishing. The results further indicate that meaningful work substantially contributes to employee thriving. Healthcare professionals who perceive their work as valuable and beneficial to society tend to demonstrate higher levels of vitality and learning.

The mediation findings suggest that workplace spirituality promotes thriving largely by increasing employees' perceptions of meaningful work. This finding aligns with studies highlighting the central role of meaningfulness in translating positive workplace experiences into favorable employee outcomes. Recent healthcare studies also emphasize that meaningful and supportive work environments are critical for sustaining healthcare workers' vitality and reducing

burnout. For healthcare institutions in Northern Sri Lanka, cultivating workplace spirituality through supportive leadership, ethical organizational practices, shared values, and opportunities for interpersonal connection may significantly improve employee thriving and retention.

Conclusion

This study contributes to the emerging literature on workplace spirituality by demonstrating its importance in promoting employee thriving among healthcare workers in Northern Sri Lanka. The findings indicate that workplace spirituality positively influences meaningful work and employee thriving, while meaningful work partially mediates this relationship. Healthcare organizations should therefore create work environments that foster purpose, compassion, community, and value alignment. Such interventions may improve healthcare workers' psychological well-being, vitality, learning, and organizational effectiveness. The study also contributes theoretically by extending Self-Determination Theory into the healthcare context and empirically validating meaningful work as an important psychological mechanism linking workplace spirituality and employee thriving.

Keywords - Workplace Spirituality; Meaningful Work; Employee Thriving; Healthcare Professionals; Positive Organizational Behaviour; Sri Lanka

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