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Can too much resilience be a bad thing?

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At first this title might easily produce the answer “No” but this presentation will hopefully open up reflective thought amongst practitioners in the field of positive psychology, clinical psychology and psychotherapy. I have worked as a Consultant cognitive behavioural psychotherapist in the field of occupational health for 20 years and over the last 5 years I have seen more individuals with symptoms of acute and chronic “burn-out” than ever before. Burnout is a prolonged response to long-term emotional and interpersonal stressors on the job. The key dimensions of this response are overwhelming exhaustion, feelings of cynicism and detachment from the job, a sense of ineffectiveness and a lack of accomplishment. It is this “prolonged response” to pressure that maintains high appraisals of threat thus maintaining high arousal/anxiety on a biological level. Eventually symptoms of “burn out” develop and lead to clinical depression. Understanding how burnout can be prevented and treated in workplaces is of great importance both from a public health perspective and for businesses aiming to reduce absenteeism and increase productivity. At the moment the focus is on 2 areas-The environment- ensuring the workplace environment is conducive to employees’ health and well-being. The individual- ensuring the individual builds effective protective factors that act as emotional buffers to the environmental pressures. The latter requires practitioners to understand the concept of “over-resilience” as to how this can contribute to burn-out rather than a lack of protective factors. In their recent article Chamorro-Premuzic and Lusk (2017) allude to this by suggesting that even adaptive competencies become maladaptive if taken to the extreme. This presentation will provide a cognitive behavioural formulation of some of these maladaptive strategies he has experienced in clinical practice as well as the theory that underpins the role they have in precipitating burn out.

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