

# The Association Between Burnout and Psychological Flexibility Among Forensic Psychologists

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## Introduction

### Burnout

- Burnout can be described as the end result of long-term, work-related stress leading to fatigue, depersonalization, and a decreased sense of personal accomplishment (Maslach, 2003; McCormack et al., 2018).
- Emotional exhaustion was found to be the most commonly reported dimension of burnout among practicing psychologists (McCormack et al., 2018).
- Burnout has also been evaluated in forensic mental health contexts. Previous findings indicate high rates of burnout among forensic mental health professionals related to the stressful nature of this field (Pirelli et al., 2020).

### Psychological Flexibility

- Psychological flexibility can be defined as nonjudgmental contact with the present moment and the ability to act in line with one's values in a given situation (Bond et al., 2006).
- Interventions that promote psychological flexibility have demonstrated positive effects on organizational behavior and overall health (Bond et al., 2006; Kashdan & Rottenberg, 2010).

## The Present Study

- The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between burnout and psychological flexibility among forensic psychology expert witnesses.
- Previous studies have found an association between psychological flexibility and burnout (e.g., Lloyd, 2013; Martínez-Rubio et al., 2020), yet no study has examined the association among the unique sample of forensic psychology expert witnesses.
- **Hypothesis:** Participants who have higher levels of psychological flexibility will have lower levels of burnout.

## Methodology

### Participants

- The participants in the study consisted of 83 forensic psychology expert witnesses (47 females, 35 males, and 1 did not answer).
- Participants ages ranged from 28 to 78 with a mean age of 49.73 years old.
- Majority of the participants were White (89%) followed by 16% Black, 6% Hispanic, 3% Asian, and 1% did not answer.

### Measures

- Maslach Burnout Inventory-Human Services Survey (MBI-HSS)
- Acceptance and Action Questionnaire (AAQ-II)
- Demographics Questionnaire

## Tables

	Psychological Flexibility	Burnout
Mean	15.12	61.05
Standard Deviation	6.68	13.46

Degree	Ph.D.	Psy.D.	M.A. or B.A.
	54	27	2

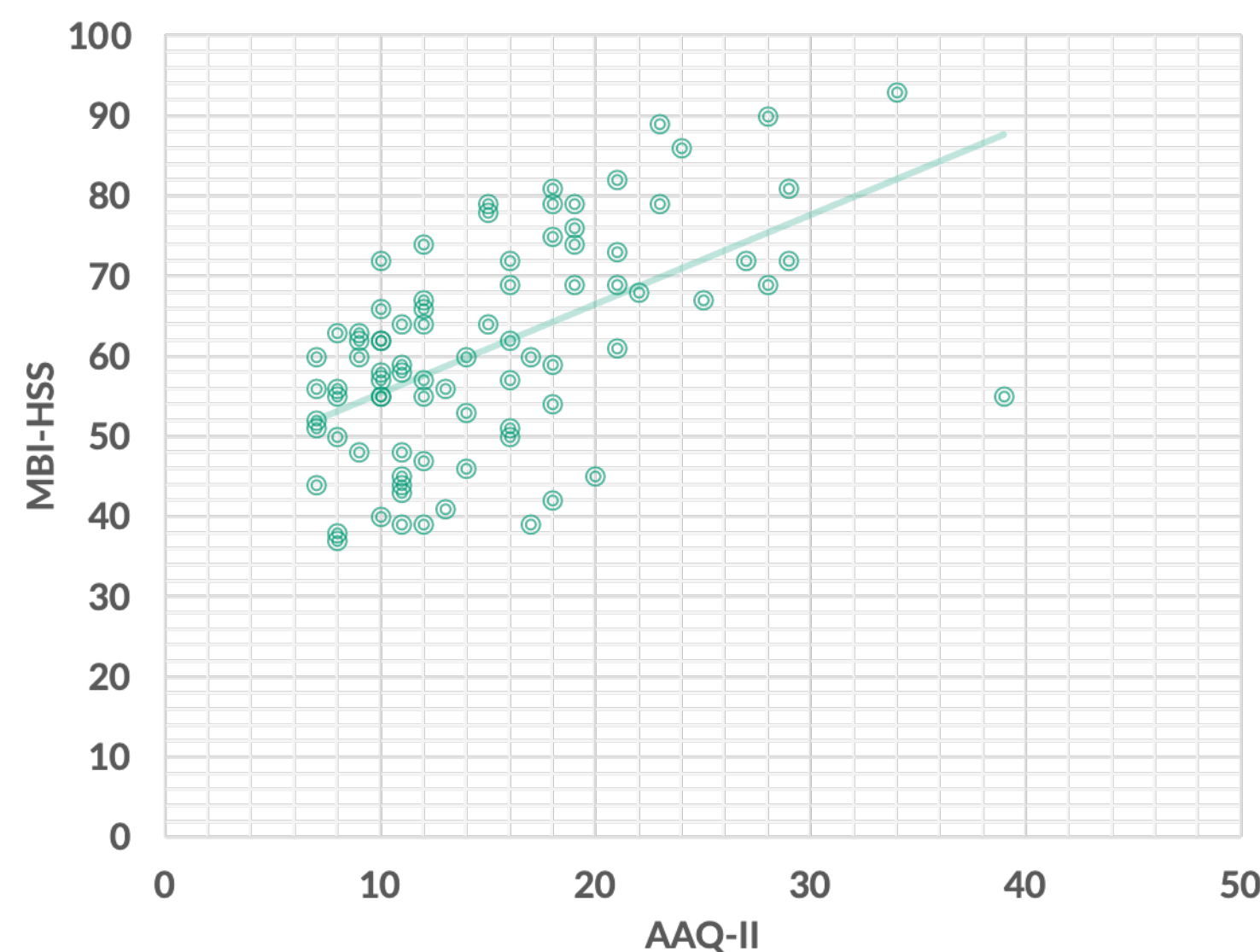
Times Testified	Under 5 Times	5-14 Times	15 Times or More
	33	28	22

Case Type	Civil	Criminal	
	13	70	

Salary	Below 100k	100k - 149k	150k or Higher
	27	35	21

## Results

A Pearson correlation was conducted to examine the association between the scores on the MBI-HSS and AAQ-II questionnaires. The analysis revealed a significant positive correlation,  $r(83) = .55, p < .001$ .



MBI-HSS total scores range from 0 to 132, with a higher score indicating higher levels of burnout.

AAQ-II total scores range from 7 to 49, with a higher score indicating lower psychological flexibility.

## Discussion

### Interpretations

- The significant relationships between burnout and psychological flexibility suggest that higher levels of burnout are associated with lower levels of psychological flexibility among forensic psychology expert witnesses.
- The limited diversity among the sample was the study's main weakness while the large size of the sample and reliability of the questionnaires were some of the strengths.
- These findings suggest that increasing psychological flexibility may protect against burnout among forensic psychologists.

### Future Directions

- Future studies may evaluate the association between psychological flexibility and burnout among this population in a more demographically and geographically diverse sample.
- An intervention study with a sample of forensic psychologists targeting psychological flexibility with the goal of preventing burnout is another area of interest.

References available upon request.

Please direct all feedback to Mariah Laster; lasterm@kean.edu