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## The effects of burnout on the professional activity of teachers

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**Abstract.** In recent years, burnout has been one of the most discussed mental health issues in modern societies. In a world facing major socioeconomic challenges, people face increasing pressure in their daily lives, especially at work. As a result, managers, employees and workers in a variety of industries and sectors around the world suffer from work-related stress, fatigue and burnout, the most prominent signs of which are often referred to as burnout syndrome. However, burnout is not exclusively work-related, as findings have shown that private life and social support also play a key role (Maslach & Jackson, 1984; Sprang, Clark, Whitt-Woosley, 2007). Professionals working in the public sector have also been found to be at greater risk of burnout than those in the private sector (Sprang, et al., 2007). Exposure factors such as long hours, assignment duration, caseloads, coupled with organizational factors such as lack of autonomy, low peer support, lack of training provide conditions where burnout will permeate inevitably at work in some capacity. The results will affect not only the professional but also the effectiveness of the job and the levels of care and support for the client (Boscarino, Figley, & Adams, 2004; Sprang, et al., 2007).

**Keywords.** burnout, professional activity, exhaustion effects

### Introduction

The concept of burnout was first introduced by Freudenberger. Since then, various definitions have emerged. A first definition was given by Maslach for burnout, thus he defines it as a syndrome of emotional exhaustion that is characterized by fatigue, somatic symptoms, a decrease in emotional resources and the feeling that he has nothing left to offer others leading to depersonalization and the development of negative, cynical attitudes and impersonal feelings towards their clients, treating them as objects as well as lacking feelings of personal accomplishment. The person feels incompetent, ineffective and has a sense of inadequacy (Lee and Ashforth 1990). This definition of burnout was the most widely used in the literature.

Freudenberger(1974) not only described the burnout syndrome but also suggested preventive measures. Because he believed that burnout was specifically related to specific work environments and organizational contexts, the author proposed intervention at the organizational level and not just at the individual level. His recommendations included shorter working hours, regular job rotation, and frequent supervision and training of staff.

In their article, Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter (2001) distinguish between a pioneering and an empirical phase of burnout research. The first phase in the mid-1970s was about describing and naming this new "syndrome". At this time, the research was mainly based on observations and interviews in the human services and health care sector.

It has also been systematically described in relation to established concepts in industrial-organizational psychology, such as job stress, job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Maslach et al., 2001).

The Maslach Burnout Inventory provides a common understanding of the concept. The questionnaire suggests that burnout is a coherent phenomenon and has made it possible to measure burnout without having to question or reflect on the underlying assumptions about this mental condition and its implications in society and beyond.

Over the past 10 years, burnout has become a topic of increasing interest to scholars, practitioners, and the workforce. Clinical psychologists, in particular, began to adopt burnout as a diagnosis and attempted not only to assess the level of burnout, but also to discriminate between burnout cases and non-cases, treatment and non-treatment (Schaufeli, Leiter, & Maslach, 2009).

Today, burnout is an established medical diagnosis in very few countries, such as the Netherlands and Sweden; in most (industrialized) countries, it remains a contested diagnosis that is widely discussed but not officially recognized in the health system.

Langle (2003) defines the phenomenon of burnout as an existential crisis resulting from a demanding and achievement-oriented modern society, resulting in a life that is alienated and removed from our existential reality and that is determined by the demanding character and consumerism that marks our present time.

These more contemporary definitions of burnout will guide this study and establish the rationale for exploring the characteristics of burnout.

Although burnout can have a negative impact on the workforce, patient care, and individual health, it can also play a protective role. It was hypothesized that the symptoms of burnout would occur to protect the human psyche from further damage. Freudenberger (1983) describes depersonalization as a means of protection against further emotional drain. Similarly, it can be argued that emotional exhaustion acts as a "brake" for individuals who do not know how or when to slow down. Negative attitudinal changes (reduction of goals at work, loss of idealism, increased self-interest) were described by Benbow (1998) as a form of coping.

Burnout has been described as a state of physical, emotional and spiritual exhaustion caused by long-term exposure to workplace stressors (Sherring and Knight, 2009; Breen and Sweeney, 2013).

Understanding burnout is hampered by the lack of a single operational definition and a clear set of criteria. Starrin, Larsson and Styrborne, (1990) confirm that it is possible to arrive at a common description of burnout rather than a common definition his.

Popular definitions that have contributed to the understanding of burnout state the following:

- Burnout is a condition that begins with prolonged levels of extreme stress at work, and thus the individual experiences feelings of tension, irritability and fatigue.
- This process takes place when employees respond defensively to workplace stress, are no longer psychologically attentive to the workplace, and thus become rigid, unfeeling, and even sarcastic (Ray, Nichols, & Perritt, 1987).
- Burnout is a gradual loss of ideals, energy and concern of people in the helping professions as a result of their working conditions.

- Burnout is characterized by a state of physical, emotional and mental exhaustion caused by long-term involvement in emotionally demanding situations (Pines and Aronson, 1988).

The above definitions vary from one another in scope and precision, but each has contributed uniquely to the understanding of burnout.

Despite this, the different definitions share certain similarities in terms of key characteristics of the phenomenon.

Burnout manifests itself according to a common pattern:

- It is installed at the individual level
- Represents an internal psychological experience involving feelings, attitudes, motives and expectations
- Refers to problems, suffering, discomfort and dysfunction
- is perceived by the individual as a negative state
- has negative consequences on the individual's life
- lead to a decrease in performance at work, efficiency in the profession.

Maslach and Jackson (1981) considered burnout to be prominent in the field of human services. There are several characteristics unique to this industry that create favorable circumstances for burnout to develop.

Human service workers often work with people who experience strong negative emotions such as anger, fear, and despair. The answers to their complicated problems are not so clear. Ambiguity leads to employee frustration. They experience a low sense of personal accomplishment and ability to perform essential work tasks. These aspects are what contribute to the development of burnout.

Maslach and Jackson's (1981) study is of interest to researchers and beyond. Participants were selected based on their feelings of exhaustion. They were interviewed, given questionnaires to fill out. Meanwhile, they were observed to have common characteristics of people experiencing burnout. The three essential characteristics of burnout identified were: emotional exhaustion, negative attitude towards others and lack of personal achievement.

Borritz(2006) states that early research between the 1970s and the late 1980s focused primarily on the causes of burnout. Research during this period was more observational and less grounded in theory. For example, Wessells (1989) identified the causes of burnout to include:

- professionals who measure success in the workplace, as opposed to the process;
- place unrealistic expectations on oneself in order to control variables beyond one's control, such as other people's emotions;
- transfer the stress to a third party, as opposed to dealing directly with the source.

These characteristics are closely aligned with the findings of Maslach and Jackson (1981). To summarize the empirical literature produced during this period, burnout indicated that it is a work-related condition resulting from individual and interpersonal factors augmented by emotional demands and organizational factors.

In the late 1980s to the late 1990s, over 1000 studies on burnout were published (Borritz, 2006). These studies were primarily cross-sectional in design. This has moved away from attempts to determine the causal factors of burnout to studying the common attributes associated with the burnout experience.

More recently, Endicott (2006) summarized similar characteristics in terms of mood indicators of burnout that include anger, cynicism, depression, and anger. In addition, the author found that people who exhibit behaviors such as absenteeism and excessive use of substances such as alcohol were exposed when experiencing burnout.

Based on these researchers it is evident that beliefs about the burnout experience have remained stable and consistent over time. Recent research has continued to focus on the experience of burnout as identified by the individual.

Borritz (2006) conducted a literature review of burnout research in this most recent period from the late 1990s to the present. This included 13 studies that had a follow-up period of more than 1 year, a response rate of more than 50% or participants that included diversity in occupational classification.

Findings from these studies identified overwhelming caseload, high levels of emotional demand, and diminished sense of support as primary factors leading to emotional exhaustion. Emotional exhaustion is the only component that professionals agree on as a prominent feature of burnout in the literature. Borritz (2006) states that current findings regarding the nature of the burnout phenomenon support that it is a complex phenomenon with a multi-factorial causality.

### **Teacher burnout**

Many teachers begin their careers with a high level of energy and motivation, wanting to make their subject interesting to their students and demonstrate interest in them. However, professional disappointments are accompanied by feelings of fear, insecurity and cause anxiety states, replacing the joy of teaching with these negative feelings. The longer a teacher works the more acute the negative feelings become after a teacher has taught for a decade or more.

This is what we call teacher burnout, which results from stress, tension and anxiety. Burnout is caused by various problems that affect teachers. Studies have shown that a third of teachers who were interviewed said they would choose a different career if they could do it over. Several issues of educational journals have addressed the issue of teacher burnout, suggesting that the problem is indeed widespread and an area of concern in the field of education (Muse, 1980).

Teacher burnout is a multidimensional construct with three related constructs: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and diminished personal accomplishments (Maslach, 1976). These three dimensions of burnout are generally used as the basis for any discussion of teacher burnout, along with the use of the burnout questionnaire (Maslach Burnout Inventory) as a standard measurement tool (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996).

Analyzing several studies, we present the factors most often invoked as triggers of Burnout Syndrome in the educational field:

The general factors, namely age, which has been determined to be one of the socio-demographic variables most often associated with the development of burnout syndrome, as well as seniority, at which teachers after 11-16 years of work in the field acquire resistance to the syndrome burnout compared to up to 5 years of internship.

Organizational factors, consisting of overload, which means time and energy, therefore create an imbalance between the demands and the performance possibilities of the employees. Role ambiguity, associated with lack of clarity for employees and increased task complexity, therefore, social support from management, colleagues and family play an important role in reducing burnout.

Personal factors, especially self-image, the way we perceive ourselves depends on the degree of self-esteem, self-appreciation we have. Also, teachers with external locus of control have fewer coping strategies, to face challenges constructively, they do not look for solutions in solving problems, but cry for pity.

Emotional exhaustion occurs when teachers feel that their emotional resources are depleted and overtaxed by contact with other people, especially their students.

Depersonalization refers to the impersonal and even dehumanized perception of others. Reduced personal achievement refers to a decline in professional competence and efficacy (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996).

Persistent stress can lead to burnout. Burnout is a cumulative response to stressors at work. It is characterized by emotional exhaustion, a lack of feelings that manifests itself through cynicism, which leads to low effectiveness (Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter, 2001). This emotional exhaustion is a response to the multitude of demands at work (Maslach et al., 2001). Inefficiency comes from excessive demands and not enough resources to meet those demands; it is defined by self-perceived inefficiency (Maslach et al., 2001).

### **The objectives of the paper**

Through this research I set out to discover the effects of burnout on the professional activity of teachers and the effects it can have on them.

### **Research hypotheses:**

- It is assumed that there is a negative correlation between burnout and the mindset towards work in teaching staff.
- It is hypothesized that there is a negative correlation between burnout and teacher fulfillment and determination.

### **The group of participants**

The sample consists of 206 participants. Among the 206 participants, 190 of them are female (92.23%) and 16 are male (7.77%).

In terms of teaching experience, the teachers who participated in my research have between 1 and 40 years of teaching experience. 19 of them have experience between 1 and 5 years (9.22%), 27 have experience between 6 and 12 years (13.11%), 43 between 13 and 20 years (20.87%), 78 between 21- 30 years old (37.87%) and 39 between 31 and 40 years old (18.93%).

### **Working tools**

Questionnaire "Mentality towards work" (Constantin, 2004).

The questionnaire includes 27 items, and the factors of the questionnaire are:

I. Mentality towards work (general score) which expresses a negative attitude towards work (low scores) or a positive attitude towards work (high scores), quality work being seen as a condition of personal existence.

II. Fulfillment and determination: work is perceived positively, as a factor of fulfillment, and involvement in work is affirmed as a condition of existence.

III. Obligation and avoidance: work is evaluated without much enthusiasm, more like an exhausting obligation, without involvement and noting only its negative aspects.

Maslach Burnout Measurement Inventory (Schaufeli, Leiter, Maslach, Jackson, 1996, pp. 22-26).

The questionnaire includes 16 items, it contains four subscales (Exhaustion, Cynicism, Professional inefficiency, Total).

I. Exhaustion: 1, 3, 5, 11, 14

II. Cynicism: 2, 7, 8, 13, 15

III. Professional inefficiency: 4, 6, 9, 10, 12, 16

IV. Total: all items

### Hypothesis testing

**Hypothesis 1:** It is assumed that there is a negative correlation between burnout and the mindset towards work in teachers.

To analyze the hypothesis, we first calculated the starting indices and identified the mean (N=11.23 for exhaustion and N=146.21 for the mentality towards work), the median (N=11 for exhaustion and N=148 for the mentality towards of work), standard deviation (N= 7.062 for burnout and 15.465) and variance (N=49.867 for burnout and N= 239.164 for work mindset) regarding burnout and work mindset.

Correlations

		scor.total. mentalitate. fata.de.munca	eputzare
Spearman's rho	scor.total.mentalitate.fata. de.munca	Correlation Coefficient	1,000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	,355**
		N	206
eputzare		Correlation Coefficient	-,355**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	,000
		N	206

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The first hypothesis of this research was statistically confirmed by calculating the Spearman coefficient. The value of this coefficient is 0.355, indicating that the correlation is significant because the Sig2-tailed is less than 0.05.

This hypothesis highlights the importance of the impact of the teacher's work mentality and its exhaustion. The more a teacher has a positive mindset about the workplace, the lower the level of burnout at the workplace.

Referring to the specialized literature, through the Job Demands-Resources Theory, a major concern of occupational research is the identification of job characteristics that can influence the psychological functioning of employees. Two broad categories of job characteristics have recently been suggested: job demands and job resources (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007).

Job demands are the physical, social or organizational aspects of the job that require sustained physical duration and/or psychological effort (cognitive or emotional) and are therefore associated with physiological and psychological costs (Demerouti et al., 2001, p. 501).

In situations that require high efforts to sustain a performance, they can become stressors and are therefore associated with high costs and negative outcomes, such as anxiety, depression and burnout. Taking these aspects into account, once burnout at work is low, the mentality towards work is positive, teachers work with pleasure and motivation.

In contrast, job resources are aspects of the job that can enhance motivation and performance. They work in at least one of two ways: by supporting the achievement of work-related goals or by promoting them through learning and development (Demerouti et al., 2001).

These two types of job characteristics have recently been examined in combination with two types of psychological outcomes, namely burnout and job engagement.

According to Goddard and O'Brien (2003) and Meerah et al (2010), after only 8 months of teaching experience, when faced with the reality of teaching, teachers' positive work mindset decreased significantly and was associated with increasing the level of burnout. Teachers

reported that they were asked to exert more effort than their more experienced colleagues and that this effort was greater than the rewards that resulted from their work.

This fact suggests a general decrease in the perception of the teaching career during the first 8 months of professional practice. Teachers' psychological experiences and perceptions of the workplace can be sources of stress that have the potential to undermine teacher effectiveness (Ransford et. al., 2009). Yates (2007) investigated the perception of primary and secondary teachers on professional learning activities based on the principles of effective professional development of teachers.

In my opinion, teachers need to adopt a positive attitude towards their workplace based on the premise that, in general, people who choose to pursue a teaching career do so out of passion and enjoyment of interacting with children or teenagers, so the mentality towards work is a positive one. This aspect makes the teacher's self-esteem to be increased and he comes to work with love.

Burnout is a very important factor in the mindset towards work as this can lead to very high discouragements and also low motivation. Very often, the teaching staff work quite a lot overtime with the students (extra hours, after-school), reaching far beyond the initial schedule that they usually have. Working with children is not exactly easy, it is quite demanding, and the teachers try to help them a lot through additional meetings, working together on what they did not understand. This aspect can lead to a very high level of burnout because it involves a lot of time spent at work. Often, after completing the program at work, teachers go home and have to take care of their families. Family is important and should not be neglected, especially children. Children may also need help from mom or dad with homework.

In addition to these aspects, the relationship with his colleagues and his superiors is important. If these relationships are deficient and there is no communication and understanding, another problem comes into play here as well. The teaching staff needs full understanding and nice collaboration with everyone to have a positive mindset about the workplace.

Today, students no longer have the same attitude towards teachers. Many of them are incomprehensible and address the teaching staff very badly. There were many episodes of student violence against teachers. Many teachers quit the job because they felt threatened and even humiliated. I believe that the lack of education of the students is a very big problem these days, and the management should take an early attitude towards these students by lowering the conduct grade and even expelling them. If there were some drastic decisions in this regard, I think many students would no longer adopt such an attitude. These attitudes come, first of all, from the family environment because in the case of many of the students who do these things, there is no education. At the same time, students may come from disadvantaged or troubled families, where they observe episodes of both physical and verbal violence and do not consider this to be abnormal. Some programs should be developed to prevent violence at school, both towards the teacher and towards peers.

Last but not least, the students' parents must have a good relationship with the teacher and communicate civilly with him if there is a problem. Many of the parents are not understanding at all and most of them blame the teaching staff for the problems that the child has, but they are not always right. In any case, there must be a common sense relationship between them because the teacher is the one who trains and helps the student to develop.

Taking all these aspects into account, I can point out that everything I have listed above are factors that lead directly to a very high level of burnout and, in the future, students, parents, colleagues and, most importantly, superiors, he should adopt a different attitude towards the teaching staff in order not to provoke such feelings.

**Hypothesis 2:** It is hypothesized that there is a negative correlation between burnout and teacher fulfillment and determination.

To analyze the second hypothesis of my research, I first calculated the starting indices and identified the mean ( N = 11.23 for exhaustion and N = 55.98 for fulfillment and determination), the median ( N = 11 for exhaustion and N =56 for fulfillment and determination), standard deviation (N= 7.062 for exhaustion and 7.58 for fulfillment and determination) and variance (N=49.867 for exhaustion and N= 49.867 for fulfillment and determination) of exhaustion and fulfillment and determination.

**Correlations**

			epuizare	implinire.si.determinare
Spearman's rho	epuizare	Correlation Coefficient	1,000	-,196**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	,005
		N	231	206
	implinire.si.determinare	Correlation Coefficient	-,196**	1,000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	,005	.
		N	206	206

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The second hypothesis of this research was statistically confirmed by calculating the Spearman coefficient. The value of this coefficient is 0.196, indicating that the correlation is significant because the Sig2-tailed is less than 0.05.

Existential fulfillment means analyzing the feeling of fulfillment in life in the general way, work being only one aspect of it. By virtue of existential fulfillment, work occupied an important place in life. The correlation between the four aspects of existential fulfillment and work pressure and burnout can be explained as follows: someone who is unable to make a clear distinction between himself and the environment has lived his life for himself, and this can lead to easy to overwork it. Someone who fails to connect work with self-transcendence may experience their work as a burden and suffer from job dissatisfaction, burnout, and cynicism. Someone who is not engaged in making choices oriented toward goals they can support (freedom and responsibility) may resort to alternative means of fulfillment, such as career, performance, status, power, and income.

All these aspects analyzed above can lead to vulnerability, because to achieve these alternative goals the person will depend on many circumstances that cannot be foreseen. People who manage to incorporate work into existential fulfillment work with inner consent and, therefore, experience less work pressure.

In burnout studies, only a few attempts have been made to quantify professional fulfillment as a possible determinant of burnout (Yiu-kee and Tang, 1995; Nindl, 2001).

There are sufficient reasons to examine the importance of existential fulfillment as a trigger of teacher burnout. They found correlations between existential life and even professional fulfillment and a decrease in burnout

Schaufeli and Enzmann (1998) in their work analyzed how the conflict between intentions and the reality of work manifests itself, thus they came to the conclusion that it is the main factor in triggering burnout. Intentions come from aspects of life that are considered valuable, leading to a sense of fulfillment and determination. Underfulfillment is linked to

unrealistic values and intentions that can lead to workplace conflict, increasing the risk of burnout.

Burnout will also increase as a result of cultural changes, due to the trend towards individualization and the increasingly high expectations of new professionals (Schaufeli and Enzmann, 1998). Cultural changes are associated with professional changes which can lead to fulfillment. Burnout is already a bigger social and educational problem, requiring special attention to be prevented and treated properly. From this perspective, the demands placed on teachers largely involve emotionally charged relationships with students and parents. They are exposed daily to stressful factors that can quickly lead to the onset of burnout.

Moreover, every year, many teachers feel unable to continue their work. By the nature of their profession it is necessary to show a great independence which must be based on the feeling of fulfillment. If teachers themselves set and believe in their own goals, they will be able to cope with burnout, otherwise they risk falling victim to role ambiguity, and this could increase the chances that they will experience increased job pressure and burnout.

### **Conclusions**

Teachers can prevent burnout through self-analysis, recognition of the burnout risk of this job, time management, schedule planning, eliminating sources of stress, healthy lifestyle, self-esteem, workplace communication both with management and with colleagues and rest.

Another important aspect that must be mentioned is the importance of psychological support for teachers experiencing burnout. This syndrome can lead to anxiety, which can present several symptoms, from a somatic or psychological point of view. Also, exhaustion can lead to depression, so it is imperative that psychologists are in direct contact with teachers, and teachers must be aware of the importance of psychological counseling.

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