

PILOT STUDY OF TEACHER BURNOUT IN GEORGIAN CONTEXT

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Abstract

Modern schools have multiple demands to teachers causing prolonged stress often resulting in professional burnout. Research on teacher burnout is conducted at various countries of the world. Taking into account the significance of such research, two pilot research studies were conducted in Georgia. The objectives of the studies were to test the hypothesis that the majority of Georgian teachers are experiencing high burnout and simultaneously to test the adopted translated instruments for measuring burnout and proactive coping strategies. The first study surveyed 85 subjects and the second study - 193 subjects.

For conducting pilot surveys an abridged version of Maslach–Burnout Self Test in combination with Greenglass's 4 point-scale Proactive Coping Inventory and Maslach Educators Survey (MBI-ES) translated into Georgian language were used.

The results of the first pilot study, in contrary to the hypothesis expecting to identify high burnout among Georgian teachers, showed that teachers have little signs of burnout and have high and moderate coping skills. In the second pilot study the hypothesis was partially confirmed in the Emotional Exhaustion aspect of burnout. For Emotional Exhaustion subscale the majority of the surveyed teachers showed moderate and high burnout. Teachers showed high scores on Personal Accomplishment subscale and low burnout on Depersonalization subscale.

Key words: *burnout, coping, distress, stress, teacher.*

Introduction

Syndrome of burnout, first identified in 1970's by clinical psychologist Herbert Freudenberger and almost simultaneously by Maslach and her colleagues at the University of California, Berkeley, seems to be more characteristic for the employees working in human services professions, e.g. nurses, social workers, teachers etc. From one dimensional model of burnout Maslach developed the multidimensional construct and identified its three aspects, such as emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach, Jackson, Leiter, 1996).

There is not one unanimously accepted definition for burnout concept (Gold, Roth, 1993). In scientific literature one can encounter multiple definitions for burnout emphasizing its different dimensions. Burnout is defined as a state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion caused by long-term involvement in situations that are emotionally demanding (Pines & Aronson, 1988). It is identified as a syndrome of physical and emotional exhaustion containing the development of negative job attitudes, and loss of empathic concern for clients (Maslach, Pines, 1984). Burnout is defined as "a persistent, negative, work-related state of mind in 'normal' individuals that is primarily characterized by exhaustion, which is accompanied by distress, a sense of reduced effectiveness, decreased motivation, and the development of dysfunctional attitudes and behaviors at work" (Schaufeli, Enzmann, 1998). „It represents an erosion in values, dignity, spirit, and will — an erosion of the human soul. It is a malady that spreads gradually and continuously over time, putting people into a downward spiral from which it's hard to recover“ (Maslach, Leiter, 1997). Some authors connect it to loss of idealism,

or loss of the ability to understand students, or role estrangement and identify as “a syndrome resulting from teachers’ inability to protect themselves against threats to their self esteem and well being” (Kyriacou, Sutcliffe, 1978). Haberman uses a behavioral definition of burnout and defines it as a condition in which teachers remain as paid employees but stop functioning as professionals. They go through the motions of teaching with no emotional commitment to the task and no sense of efficacy. They have come to believe that what they can do will make no significant difference in the lives of their students and see no reason to continue caring or expending any serious effort. They have become detached job-holders who feel neither responsible nor accountable for students’ behavior, learning, or anything else. Their only goal is to do the minimum required to remain employed (Haberman, 1995).

More than 6000 books, dissertations and journal articles have been published about this concept. Despite the fact that burnout is not a recognized disorder in DSM, it is listed in ICD -10, Z73.0 in chapter seven, under the problems related to life–management difficulty. Burnout prevention and overcoming its results for teachers is one of the most important issues in education. For motivating students teachers need to maintain positive attitudes towards their jobs, colleagues and students. Modern schools have multiple demands to teachers causing prolonged stress often resulting in professional burnout. The nature and organization of teacher work, pressure to do more with fewer resources, role conflicts, ambiguity and overload, constant potentially stressful interaction with students, parents and administration make teachers easily susceptible to burnout damaging teacher health and wellbeing at the same time decreasing quality of teaching. As research shows, the burnt-out teachers are more prone to dogmatic teaching practice and rigidly rely on structure and routine (Cunningham, 1983) thus slowing down school reforms. Therefore, research on teacher burnout and its deeper understanding seems to be very interesting and valuable for the policy and decision-makers at national and school levels.

Problem of Research

Burnout researchers can be distinguished by their approach to the solution of the problem. Psychological direction researchers suggest to help the burnout victims by obtaining and strengthening stress coping strategies (Cedoline, 1982; Swick, Hanley, 1983; Gold, Roth, 1993; Pines 1993; Tuebsing, Tubesing, 1982), whereas sociological direction researchers suggest to look for the burnout causes within organizational systems (Dworkin, 1986; Dworkin, 1997; LeCompte, Dworkin, 1991; Dworkin, Townsend, 1994) and introduce changes in school management style and administration practices. Both approaches seem to give valuable insights in the study of burnout syndrome.

Burnout studies originating in the USA is conducted at many countries of the world showing various degrees of burnout among teachers starting from 10% - to 40% in west and east Europe and about 50% in some Asian countries (Maslach, Schaufeli, Leiter, 2001). Despite some problems with international studies related to burnout survey instrument translation and cultural issues, still it is considered to be the most reliable tool (Schaufeli, Leiter, Maslach, 2008).

Research Focus

The main purpose of the present study was to make initial steps in the study of burnout among Georgian teachers and conduct small-scale pilot studies in order to select a proper research instrument and prepare the background for a larger study in the scale of the whole country. In particular, the goals of the conducted two small-scale studies were the following: to obtain initial data about the degree of Georgian teacher background and test the hypothesis

that majority of Georgian teachers experience high burnout, to translate MBI into Georgian and adopt the most popular instruments for burnout study.

Methodology of Research

General Background of Research

For conducting research on burnout many instruments have been developed. Among them is Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), which has been widely used in investigating teachers' burnout syndromes and consistently found to be a reliable instrument (e.g., Beck and Gargiulo, 1983; Anderson and Iwanicki, 1984; etc). The MBI dominated the field and by the end of 1990s it was used in 93 per cent of journal articles and dissertations (Schaufeli, Leither, Maslach, 2008). Later were developed some alternative instruments such as Copenhagen Burnout Inventory and Oldenburg Burnout inventory (Kristensen, Borritz, Villadsen, Christensen, 2005; Demerouti, Bakker, Vardakou, Kantas, 2002). For conducting the studies in Georgia MBI inventory was preferred.

Burnout studies have focused on burnout causes which are assumed to be in connection with teachers personality types, locus control (McIntyre (1981), coping skills, neuroticism, etc as well as with the causes existing independent of teacher perceptions and are more managerial type problems: such as ambiguous role expectations (Kyriacou, Sutcliffe, 1977); unreasonable time demands (Lortie 1975); large classes (Coates, Thoresen, 1976); poor staff relations (Young 1978); inadequate buildings and facilities (Rudd, Wiseman 1962); salary considerations (Gritz, Theobald, 1996; Tye, O'Brien, 2002); lack of resources, isolation and fear of violence (Brissie, Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, 1988); and disruptive students (Dunham 1977; Friedman 1995). Howard and Johnson classified the causes of teacher stress into the following categories: poor teacher-student relationships, time pressure, role conflict, poor working conditions, lack of control and decision making power, poor colleague relationships, feelings of personal inadequacy, and extra-organizational stressors (Howard, Johnson 2004).

The need for administrative support is also frequently cited as a critical condition of work (Tapper 1995). Lack of administrative support is a category that includes but is not limited to the following teacher perceptions: principals are "not supportive" if they do not handle discipline to the teachers' liking; do not understand the instructional program the teachers are trying to offer; do not provide the time and resources the teachers believe necessary; do not value teachers' opinions or involve them sufficiently in decision making; do not support them in disputes with parents; or fail to listen to their problems and suggestions (Haberman, 2004).

When confronted with so many stressors teachers' coping mechanisms are activated to deal with demands. When those coping mechanisms fail to stem the demands then stress increases and threatens the teachers' mental and physical well-being ultimately leading to teachers quitting or burning out.

Sample of Research

Two small-scale pilot surveys were conducted in Georgia. In the first pilot survey a random sample of 85 teachers from Tbilisi and Georgia's regions were used who filled out Maslach Burnout Self Test (abridged inventory) in combination with Greenglass's 4 point-scale Proactive Coping Inventory. In the second pilot survey a full version of Maslach Educators Survey (MBI-ES) was used filled out by 193 randomly selected Tbilisi secondary school teachers.

Instrument and Procedures

For conducting the first pilot study Maslach Burnout Self Test (5 point-scale) was used in combination with E. Greenglass – Proactive Coping Inventory (4 point-scale). The survey was filled out at teacher training sessions.

Full version of Maslach Educators Survey (MBI-ES) consisting of 22 item 6 point-scale was administered with individual teachers. In both cases teachers’ participation was voluntary and anonymous.

Data Analysis

Descriptive and correlational research analysis was used in the current study. For data analysis was used Excel for the first pilot study and SPSS 19 for the second pilot study.

Results of Research

The results for the first pilot study are given in Table 1 and Table 2 below.

Table 1. Results for Burnout Self Test.

N of subjects	No sign of burnout	Little signs of burnout	At risk of burnout	At severe risk of burnout	At very severe risk of burnout
85	3 (4%)	50 (59%)	32 (37%)	0	0

Table 2. Results for Proactive Coping Inventory.

N of subjects	High level skills of coping with stress N/%	Medium level skills of coping with stress N/%	Low level skills of coping with stress N/%
85	61 (72%)	24 (28%)	0

According to Table 1 the majority of the surveyed teachers showed little signs of burnout (59%) or showed that they are at risk of burnout (37%). No cases of being at severe burnout risk or at very severe burnout risk were revealed. 4% of the surveyed teachers consider that they have no signs of burnout.

Table 2 shows that 72% of the surveyed teachers have high level skills of coping with stress. 28% consider that they have medium level skills of coping with stress. Correlation was revealed between the stress coping ability and burnout. The majority of teachers have proactive coping skills and correspondingly they have little signs of burnout.

To receive more accurate results the second pilot survey was conducted with full version of Maslach Educators Survey (MBI-ES). MBI was filled out by 193 teachers. The survey had 22 item scored with 6 point-scale. MBI measured burnout according three subscales: Personal Accomplishment (PA), Emotional Exhaustion (EE), and Depersonalization (DP). Each subscales had defined high, moderate and low frequencies.

The main findings of the second survey were as follows: on Personal Accomplishment subscale 62.7% of teachers showed high personal accomplishment, 24.4 % - moderate, and 13% of teachers low personal accomplishment; On Depersonalization subscale 92.1% showed

low, 6.7% showed moderate and 1% of teachers showed high level of burnout. As for Emotional Exhaustion subscale 18.7 % of teachers showed high level of burnout, 28.5 % showed moderate burnout and 52.8% showed low burnout. See Below Figures 1, 2, and 3.

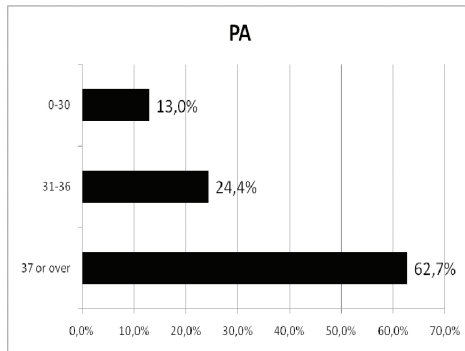


Figure 1: Personal Accomplishment Subscale results.

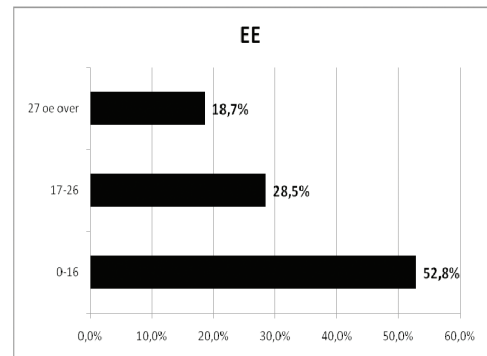


Figure 2: Emotional Exhaustion Subscale results.

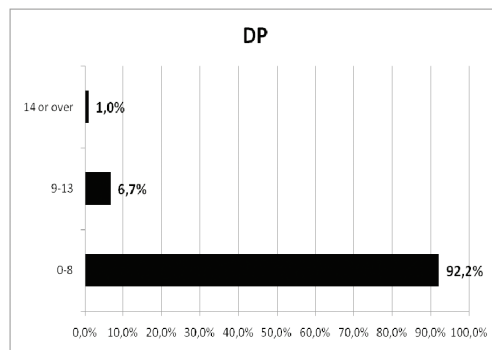


Figure 3: Depersonalization Subscale results.

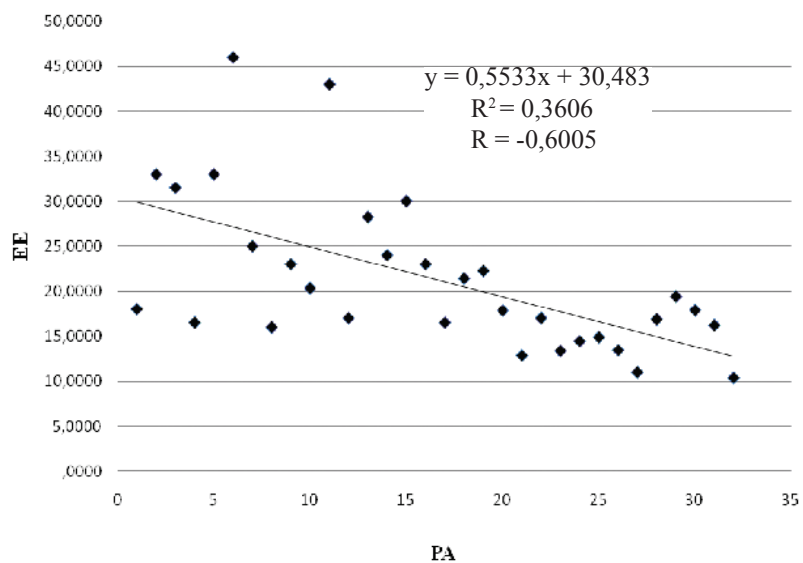


Figure 4: Correlation between Emotional Exhaustion and Personal Accomplishment.

Figure 4 above shows the high correlation between Emotional Exhaustion and Personal Accomplishment, $R^2=0.3606$, $R=-0.6005$.

Discussion

The received results from the first pilot study did not prove the stated hypothesis that the majority of teachers in Georgia are experiencing high levels of burnout. Prior conducting of the first survey the expectation was that teachers in Georgia will be at moderate or severe burnout risk because of the conditions they have to work. In particular: they are involved in carrying out complex and multiple reforms at schools, have meager salaries and are under stress due to forthcoming teacher certification exams. Also they have to deal with job insecurity due to school merging and short contracts, little support available from the professional unions, mentoring, large volume of new teaching materials and new methodology, and overcrowded classes. The results of proactive stress coping strategy test were much higher than expected.

The results of the second study using MBI –ES partially proved the initial hypothesis. According the received results Georgian teachers mostly suffer from Emotional Exhaustion aspect of burnout. 18.7 % showed that they have high burnout and 28.5% moderate burnout. It means that 47.2 % of teachers are experiencing medium and high burnout. On PA and DP scales teachers reported high personal accomplishments and low depersonalization.

It should be noted that some inconsistencies were found in teachers' answers to the survey questions and their responses in informal conversations when teachers talked about the symptoms that can be considered to be burnout symptoms. E.g. difficulty to concentrate on tasks, feeling that they are overloaded, that the requirements are inadequate, that they are constantly exhausted and will retire if the pensions are not so small, do not know how to act in various critical situations, that their work is underestimated by students, parents, administrators and society, they have lost their health to the profession that has such low status today, etc.

To explain such inconsistencies it can be questioned whether it is a case when the forthcoming exams, fear to lose a job, stress to be perceived as incompetent becomes the reason for over mobilization. Strain makes them to assess themselves inadequately or makes them to be insincere while filling out questionnaires. Another issue is whether it is the accumulation effect. The data may correctly depict the reality at this moment but will have long-term results leading to burnout. The first pilot survey that identified that teachers were at risk of burnout preceded in time to the second survey which identified moderate and high burnout (in EE subscale). Only longitudinal study will have answers to these questions.

To remedy teacher burnout prevention of burnout rather fighting with its results seems to be the best strategy. Remedies can include a variety of approaches: awareness raising campaigns about burnout, informing teachers and Principals about the dangers of burnout for teachers themselves, their families and students, physiological trainings, learning cognitive coping strategies, offering time management, stress management, problem solving skills development trainings, changing environment, introducing teacher mentoring mechanisms etc. As in most cases many stressors have managerial aspect, that's why changes should be made on organizational level towards teacher empowerment, their inclusion in decision-making processes, changing traditional, rigid bureaucratically administered schools resulting in low teacher commitment and job satisfaction to more flexible school organizations that use collaborative problem solving strategies and which promote greater teacher affiliation with the school raising teacher morale. In the more flexible schools teachers believe they can contribute to positive school change and that their ideas will be sought after and used (Macmillan, 1999). Principal's role in this process is very important in the aspects of providing strong supportive leadership, rewarding good teaching, improving existing resource management, breaking down teachers' isolation and encouraging team teaching and joint planning, and helping teachers to function as continuous learners.

The further research will benefit from using a mixture of qualitative and quantitative methods giving more accurate picture of the real situation. Also, other tools, such as school environment questionnaire, principal's leadership style, etc., will be used in combination with MBI-ES that proved to be an effective tool in measuring burnout in order to analyze the stressors that can be rooted in teacher personal traits and/or in work related stressors.

Conclusions

The article examined the results of two pilot studies. The first pilot study demonstrated teachers' high coping skills and low burnout, though showed small signs of being at risk of burnout. The second pilot study identified moderate and burnout aspect such as emotional exhaustion as more characteristic to Georgian teachers. MBI-ES proved to be an effective tool to measure burnout. Further studies will benefit from longitudinal approach as the accumulation effect seems to be the taking place especially in the period of major education reforms in the country.

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