

The level of burnout experienced by teachers

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Abstract

In this research, which was conducted to determine burnout experienced by teachers working at public schools in Kütahya, Turkey data collected from 386 teachers were analyzed. Results indicate that almost half of teachers experience burnout. Great number of teachers feel tired at least occasionally. Female teachers feel tired more than their male counterparts. Male teachers feel trapped, worthless and unsuccessful more than their female colleagues. Teachers working at technical high schools experience burnout more than other teachers. Reduction of teacher workload, exploration of why teachers experience burnout and generating preventive measures from research findings were suggested.

Keywords: Teacher, school, burnout

1. Introduction

People have negative feelings when their expectations do not comply with their work life (Schaufeli & Enzmann, 1998). This psychological syndrome is called as burnout and it results in failure, dissatisfaction, and low energy so that it reduces work efficiency and productivity (Freudenberger, 1974). Burnout is experienced more in professions that have intensive human relations (Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Maslach, 2003). Therefore, Maslach and Jackson associate burnout with these professions and define it as “a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who do ‘people work’ of some kind” (1986, p. 1). Teachers are exposed to burnout more than individuals working at other professions (De Heus & Diekstra, 1999). Work environment, for this reason, acts as a main factor affecting burnout (Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter, 2001). For example, positive school climate (Lim & Eo, 2014), organizational support (Ju et al., 2015; Meylan et al., 2015), organizational citizenship (İnanlı & Büyüközkan, 2013) and organizational trust (Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2015) reduce burnout while student misbehaviors (McCormick & Barnett, 2011; Aloe et al., 2014) and work stress (Yu et al., 2015) increase burnout. Teacher burnout is an important problem affecting education systems (Loonstra, Brouwers & Tomic, 2009). Student success relies on effective teachers (Rushton, Morgan & Richard, 2007; Seidel & Shavelson, 2007). It seems likely that student success may fall if teachers experience burnout. This study aims to determine levels of burnout experienced by teachers working at public schools, and to determine differences caused by gender, branch, and school type.

The literature on burnout offer some models to explain it. Cherniss (1980) claimed that burnout was a psychological state caused by work stress, social relations, uncertain goals, lack of organizational support, and this state makes workers isolate themselves from the work place. Edelwich and Brodsky (1980) defined burnout as a psychological defense mechanism developed in response to unmet expectations of newbie workers who were enthusiastic, vibrant and idealistic. Perlman and Hartman (1982) portrayed burnout as emotional and physiological exhaustion, low work efficiency and impersonation reactions to stress. According to Meier (1983) burnout occurs

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once workers expect harm rather than benefit from work when they experience low self-efficacy. Maslach and Jackson (1981) assert that burnout happens in three stages: workers experience emotional exhaustion first when they encounter demands that are hard to fulfill. Then they find desensitization to work as a way to escape from this situation. Finally, they perceive themselves as a failure. Pines (2005) indicates that people who are motivated by work cannot achieve success they expect when they under persistent pressure, and this results in a reduced motivation, depression, despair, physiological, emotional and psychological exhaustion.

2. Methodology

The research was conducted employing survey method. This method is based on collecting data from large samples, so generalization of the findings can be meaningful (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012). Population of this research consists of 981 teachers working at public schools in Tavşanlı province of Kütahya city in Turkey during 2014-2015 academic year. Data collected through questionnaire forms from 400 teachers working at 25 schools selected randomly from 123 public schools in the province. Forms that are answered faulty were eliminated and remaining 386 forms were analyzed. Minimum sample size required to represent the population was calculated as 350 considering 5% error rate and 2% confidence interval. Therefore, the sample of this research can be claimed to be representative. Statistics regarding to participants of the research were indicated in Table 1.

Table 1. Participant statistics

Factor	Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	216	56
	Female	156	40
	Unspecified	14	4
Branch	Class Teacher	136	35
	Subject Teacher	250	65
School Type	Primary	142	37
	Secondary	86	22
	High	111	29
	Technical High	47	12

The Burnout Measure Short Version developed by Pines (2005) and adapted into Turkish by Tümkaya, Çam and Çavuşoğlu (2009) was used as the data collection instrument. The measure includes 10 items in 7 point Likert style ranging from 'never' and 'always'. Adapted version of the measure explains 55.92% of total variance in one factor and had Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of .91. When data of this study had been analyzed, 63.8% of total variance were explained in one factor and had Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of .90. Also confirmatory factor analysis of data collected in the study indicated an acceptable fit ($\chi^2/df=5.66$, RMSEA=0.11, GFI=0.91, AGFI=0.85, SRMR=0.053, IFI=0.97, NFI=0.96, RFI=0.95).

3. Results

The highest mean belongs to the item 'I feel tired' ($\bar{X}=4.16$, Sd=1.36) which located at sometimes level (Table 2). Items of 'I feel disappointed with people' ($\bar{X}=3.41$, Sd=1.41), 'I feel hopeless' ($\bar{X}=3.27$, Sd=1.56) and 'I've had it' ($\bar{X}=2.78$, Sd=1.38) were located at rarely level. Others were located at almost never level. The lowest mean belongs to the item 'I feel worthless and unsuccessful' ($\bar{X}=2.06$, Sd=1.31).

Table 2. Item statistics

Items	\bar{X}	SD
Tired	4.16	1.36
Disappointed with people	3.41	1.41
Hopeless	3.27	1.56
I've had it	2.78	1.38
Depressed	2.55	1.37
Difficulties sleeping	2.50	1.43
Trapped	2.46	1.56
Helpless	2.38	1.43
Physically weak/Sickly	2.27	1.25
Worthless/Like a Failure	2.06	1.31
Total	2.79	1.02

Once levels of teacher burnout were calculated through total means, 214 (55.3%) teachers were at never and almost never levels, 144 (37.2%) teachers were at rarely and sometimes levels, 28 (7.1%) teachers were at often, very often and always levels (Table 3).

Table 3. Burnout levels of teachers

Burnout Levels	f	%
Never	69	17.8
Almost never	145	37.5
Rarely	99	25.6
Sometimes	45	11.6
Often	23	5.9
Very often	4	1
Always	1	0.2
Total	386	100

Table 4. Gender based differences in perceptions

Item	Gender	n	\bar{X}	SD	df	t	p
Tired	Male	216	3.95	1.38	370	-3.17	.002*
	Female	156	4.40	1.30			
Disappointed with people	Male	216	3.42	1.40	370	0.25	.803
	Female	156	3.38	1.39			
Hopeless	Male	216	3.27	1.59	370	.07	.94
	Female	156	3.26	1.48			
Trapped	Male	216	2.61	1.67	370	2.31	.021*
	Female	156	2.24	1.38			
Helpless	Male	216	2.43	1.46	370	1.05	.295
	Female	156	2.27	1.36			
Depressed	Male	216	2.62	1.42	370	1.68	.093
	Female	156	2.38	1.22			
Physically weak/Sickly	Male	216	2.18	1.25	370	-1.82	.070
	Female	156	2.42	1.26			
Worthless/Like a Failure	Male	216	2.19	1.37	370	2.36	.019*
	Female	156	1.87	1.19			
Difficulties sleeping	Male	216	2.46	1.40	370	-0.79	.430
	Female	156	2.58	1.45			
I've had it	Male	216	2.81	1.43	370	0.82	.413
	Female	156	2.69	1.27			
Total	Male	216	2.79	1.08	370	0.41	.681
	Female	156	2.75	.92			

*p< .05

Independent samples t test to define gender based differences indicated differences at the items of 'I feel tired' ($t(370) = -3.17, p < .05$), 'I feel trapped' ($t(370) = 2.31, p < .05$) and 'I feel worthless and unsuccessful' ($t(370) = 2.36, p < .05$). Female teachers had a higher mean at the item of 'I feel tired', and male teachers had higher means at the items of 'I feel trapped' and 'I feel worthless and unsuccessful'. Therefore, it can be asserted that female teachers tired more than male teachers and male teachers felt more trapped, worthless and unsuccessful than female teachers.

Independent samples t test to define teacher branch based differences indicated no differences (Table 5).

Table 5. Teacher Branch Based Differences in Perceptions

Item	Branch	n	\bar{X}	SD	df	t	p
Tired	Class	136	4.06	1.33	384	-1.09	.278
	Subject	250	4.22	1.36			
Disappointed with people	Class	136	3.36	1.43	384	-0.51	.614
	Subject	250	3.44	1.39			
Hopeless	Class	136	3.11	1.50	384	-1.53	.127
	Subject	250	3.36	1.58			
Trapped	Class	136	2.57	1.60	384	1.07	.287
	Subject	250	2.40	1.54			
Helpless	Class	136	2.35	1.38	384	-0.28	.778
	Subject	250	2.40	1.46			
Depressed	Class	136	2.59	1.27	384	0.39	.700
	Subject	250	2.53	1.41			
Physically weak/Sickly	Class	136	2.29	1.34	384	0.23	.818
	Subject	250	2.26	1.20			
Worthless/Like a Failure	Class	136	2.07	1.35	384	0.02	.988
	Subject	250	2.06	1.28			
Difficulties sleeping	Class	136	2.50	1.47	384	-0.03	.979
	Subject	250	2.50	1.41			
I've had it	Class	136	2.66	1.35	384	-1.27	.207
	Subject	250	2.85	1.39			
Total	Class	136	2.76	1.04	384	-0.42	.678
	Subject	250	2.80	1.01			

ANOVA test to determine school type differences indicated statistically significant differences at the items of 'I feel disappointed with people' ($F(3,382) = 4.79, p < .05$), 'I feel hopelessness' ($F(3,382) = 6.19, p < .05$), 'I feel trapped' ($F(3,382) = 5.34, p < .05$), 'I feel helpless' ($F(3,382) = 5.55, p < .05$) and at total scores ($F(3,382) = 4.05, p < .05$). LSD post hoc test to determine resource of differences indicated that mean scores of teachers working at technical high schools were higher at the items and total scores given above. Therefore, it can be asserted that teachers working at technical high schools feel more disappointment, hopelessness, as trapped, as helpless and they experience burnout more than teachers working at primary, middle and other high schools.

Table 6. School type based differences in perceptions

Item	School	n	\bar{X}	SD	F	p	LSD
Tired	Primary	142	4.08	1.32	1.58	.194	
	Secondary	86	4.29	1.55			
	High	111	4.03	1.21			
	Technical	47	4.47	1.36			
Disappointed with people	Primary	142	3.37	1.43	4.79	.003*	1-4
	Secondary	86	3.34	1.34			2-4
	High	111	3.22	1.28			3-4
	Technical	47	4.11	1.55			
Hopeless	Primary	142	3.14	1.49	6.19	.000*	1-4
	Secondary	86	3.10	1.53			2-4
	High	111	3.20	1.54			3-4
	Technical	47	4.17	1.56			
Trapped	Primary	142	2.55	1.59	5.34	.001*	1-4
	Secondary	86	2.19	1.47			2-4
	High	111	2.24	1.41			3-4
	Technical	47	3.19	1.75			
Helpless	Primary	142	2.35	1.36	5.55	.001*	1-4
	Secondary	86	2.12	1.32			2-4
	High	111	2.31	1.34			3-4
	Technical	47	3.13	1.77			
Depressed	Primary	142	2.59	1.26	2.19	.089	
	Secondary	86	2.28	1.33			
	High	111	2.57	1.41			
	Technical	47	2.89	1.52			
Physically weak/Sickly	Primary	142	2.26	1.33	0.24	.868	
	Secondary	86	2.31	1.22			
	High	111	2.20	1.21			
	Technical	47	2.36	1.18			
Worthless/Like Failure	Primary	142	2.05	1.33	2.49	.060	
	Secondary	86	1.87	1.11			
	High	111	2.05	1.25			
	Technical	47	2.51	1.57			
Difficulties sleeping	Primary	142	2.51	1.45	0.15	.925	
	Secondary	86	2.57	1.36			
	High	111	2.43	1.44			
	Technical	47	2.53	1.50			
I've had it	Primary	142	2.68	1.33	2.14	.094	
	Secondary	86	2.64	1.29			
	High	111	2.84	1.46			
	Technical	47	3.21	1.42			
Total	Primary	142	2.76	1.02	4.05	.007*	1-4
	Secondary	86	2.67	0.93			2-4
	High	111	2.71	1.01			3-4
	Technical	47	3.25	1.07			

*p<.05, 1:Primary, 2:Secondary, 3:High, 4:Technical

4. Discussion and recommendations

A great number of teachers of the research sample felt tired. Burnout based on tiredness is often associated to work load (Van Droogenbroeck, Spruyt & Vanroelen, 2014). Female teachers tired more than their male colleagues and male teachers feel trapped, worthless and unsuccessful

more than their female colleagues. This difference may be resulted from females' being better at social relations comparing to males (Ergin, 1992). Also, literature indicate similar findings regarding to gender based differences in burnout (Başol & Altay, 2009; Çağlar, 2011; Deryakulu, 2005; Otacıoğlu, 2008; Özben & Argun, 2003). Likewise, 44.7% of the teachers experienced burnout at rarely and higher levels. Given the fact that burnout reduces teacher efficiency and student success this finding can be considered as alerting. Similar rates had been reported by past research (Akın & Oğuz, 2010; Akman, Taşkın, Özden & Çörtü, 2010; Bağcı & Karagül, 2013; Çağlar, 2011). There was no statistically significant difference affecting class teachers' and subject teachers' perceptions regarding burnout. This might stem from the fact that burnout is related to work place factors and both teacher groups experience similar work environments. Teachers working at technical high schools experience burnout more than those work at other schools. Given the fact that face to face interrelationships at technical high schools take place at a higher rate comparing to other types of schools, the difference might be a result of this situation. Because burnout is experienced more frequently in where social relations are intense (Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Maslach, 2003).

Recommendations generated from the findings of this study are as follows: Workloads of teachers should be reduced due to the fact that increased work load may result in increased burnout. Given the fact that almost half of the teachers experience burnout, it is essential to research why teachers experience burnout, and then generate preventive measures to cure the problem. International studies may provide clues in preventing teacher burnout. Similarly investigating why teachers working at technical high schools experience burnout more than their counterparts working at other high schools is vital to finding solutions.

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