

PERSONAL AND SOCIAL ASPECTS OF TEACHER BURNOUT IN GEORGIA

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Abstract

The study aimed to identify personal and social factors having impact on teacher burnout in Georgia. The survey was conducted on 373 Georgian school teachers. Teacher burnout phenomena was studied in connection with psychological factor such as locus of control and social factors - school climate dimensions: Principals' attitude to teachers, teachers' attitude to colleagues and to students. Qualitative and quantitative methods were used for the research. The highest teacher burnout was identified on Emotional Exhaustion subscale of burnout. Correlations were confirmed between burnout and locus of control, school climate variables and burnout, teacher burnout and number of students. The research findings are important as teacher burnout identification and its prevention is closely connected to teacher well-being and health ultimately having impact on teaching quality.

Key words: burnout, locus of control, principal, school climate, teacher.

Introduction

Studies on Burnout initiated by Herbert Freudenberger (1970) and simultaneously by Christina Maslach and her colleagues at the University of California, Berkeley, were extensive in the past decades. Burnout was more characteristic for the employees working in human services professions, such as: nurses, social workers, teachers, etc. Even among human services professions teacher burnout was identified as a widespread problem (Brill, 1984; Bullough & Baughman, 1977) and this concept was frequently used in relation to teachers (Caldwell & Dorling, 1991).

Large number of teacher burnout studies conducted in various countries are closely related to the reform periods. During reform time it is possible to deeper analyze this concept and study its effect on teachers. Education reform has been taking place in Georgia for several years. Considerable changes took place in teaching profession as well. No extensive studies on teacher burnout were conducted in Georgia, that's why the research results are actual. The results can be useful for policy and decision-makers as well as for school administrators.

Problem of Research

Professional burnout can entail many negative results for school, students, society and teachers. Researchers in many countries confirm that teacher burnout can cause lowering of teaching quality. Teachers experiencing burnout tend to be dogmatic about their practices and to rely rigidly on structure and routine, thus slowing down school reforms, have little organizational loyalty and demonstrate less collegiality (Cunningham, 1983).

Studies have focused on burnout causes that are assumed to be in connection with teacher personality types, locus control (McIntyre, 1981), coping skills, neuroticism, etc as well as with the causes existing apart of teacher perceptions and are more managerial problems. Haberman (2004) lists some of the studies stating the causes of burnout such as: an 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 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).

Maslach proposed a three-dimensional model of burnout identifying aspects such as: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach, Jackson & Leiter, 1996). The research findings underline that among burnout subscales the emotional exhaustion leads to the worst results for organization (Halbesleben & Buckley, 2004). Golembiewky and Munzenrider stated that burnout is a slow and hardly visible process and compared it to the process of child growth, which is not noticeable for them who observe child every day (Golembiewky & Munzenrider, 1984).

Maslach noted the connections of burnout with employee overload and time restriction (Maslach et al., 2001). Specific factors such as role conflicts and ambiguity cause stress for a short time but if prolonged, they create an accumulation effect leading to burnout (Brill, 1984; Caldwell & Dorling, 1991; Gmelch, 1993; Gold & Roth, 1993).

Research Focus

This research aimed to identify teacher burnout level in Georgian teachers and find out the impact of some personal and social factors on it. Teacher burnout phenomena was studied in connection with psychological factor - locus of control and social factors - school climate description dimensions: Principals' attitude to teachers, teachers' attitude to colleagues and students.

In 2010-11 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 was chosen 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. 193 randomly selected Tbilisi secondary school teachers participated in the second pilot survey. The goals of the conducted two small-scale studies were: (1) to obtain initial data about the degree of burnout among Georgian teachers and (2) to adapt burnout research instrument to Georgian population (Bitsadze & Japaridze, 2011).

Methodology of Research

General Background of Research

According to National Statistics Office of Georgia there are 68670 teachers in Georgia. During 2010-13 total number of teachers has decreased from 79891 to 68670. During 3 years a total of 11221 teachers were out of the profession. It was caused by various factors, such as: schools optimization, decrease in student numbers etc. On the other hand, for the younger

generation this profession is unattractive and inflow of novice teachers in the profession is very little. In comparison with 2007 data the students willing to continue studies in education direction on all three levels (bachelor, master, PhD) has significantly reduced because of low teacher salaries and little attractiveness of the profession. Among the working teachers, 30 year-old and younger teachers constitute only 10.6 % of teachers. From the total number of teachers 40.4 % is of a retirement age. On this background, it was interesting to analyze social and personal factors impacting burnout of active teachers.

Sample of Research

During the research 407 respondents who expressed willingness to participate in the survey filled out the questionnaires. From the collected questionnaires 34 were dismissed due to incompleteness. The final results of the research were based on the analysis of the data obtained from 373 questionnaires. The research was conducted in 2012-2013. Participation in the survey was anonymous and voluntary.

Instrument and Procedures

A combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods were used to study this issue. Individual interviews with teachers preceded the quantitative research. The research questions were identified and relevant research instruments were selected. The final research tool consisted of three various instruments: Maslach Burnout Inventory for Educators (Maslach, MBI-ES, 1986), Rotter Control Locus Scale (J.B. Rotter, 1966) and Wayne Hoy's Organization Climate Description for Middle Schools (Wayne Hoy, OCDQ-RM, 1997). MBI-ES was translated into Georgian language and piloted on Georgian population a year earlier (Bitsadze & Japaridze, 2011). Rotter scale was selected among other instruments for Locus of Control research as it was already adapted to Georgian population. OCDQ-RM was translated into Georgian language and adapted to Georgian population. Collected demographic information included teacher gender, age, educational level, social status and also data on teacher working experience, number of students.

Despite some problems related to using MBI for burnout measuring in international research such as issues related to translation and cultural differences, MBI still is considered to be the most reliable instrument for burnout research (Schaufeli, Leiter & Maslach, 2008). MBI identifies burnout on 3 subscales: Emotional Exhaustion (EE), Personal Accomplishment (PA) and Depersonalization (DP). Rotter control locus scale identifies persons having internal, external and mixed locus of control. School climate research instrument, OCDQ-RM consists of 50 statements and measures school climate on 6 scales. Three of them measures Principal's behavior: Supportive (SUP), Directive (DIR) and Restrictive (RES) and 3 - measures teachers behavior: Collegial (COL), Committed (COM) and Distanced (DIS).

Data Analysis

Descriptive and correlation research analysis was used in the current study. To evaluate the factors, T-test and Anova were used which allow to determine if the averages of two or more samples are significantly different and Pearson's correlation was used to determine which factors are influencing each other. Statistics program SPSS (PASW Statistics 21) was used to process the results.

Results of Research

Teacher Burnout Subscales

The research results showed that on Emotional Exhaustion (EE) subscale 23.7 % of the surveyed teachers experienced high level of burnout, 25.8% experienced moderate level of burnout and 50.4% experienced low level of burnout. On Personal Accomplishment (PA) subscale 16.80% of teachers showed high burnout, 22% - moderate and 61.13% - low burnout. On Depersonalization subscale 2.70% of teachers showed high burnout, 5.30 % - moderate and 92 % - low burnout (Figure 1).

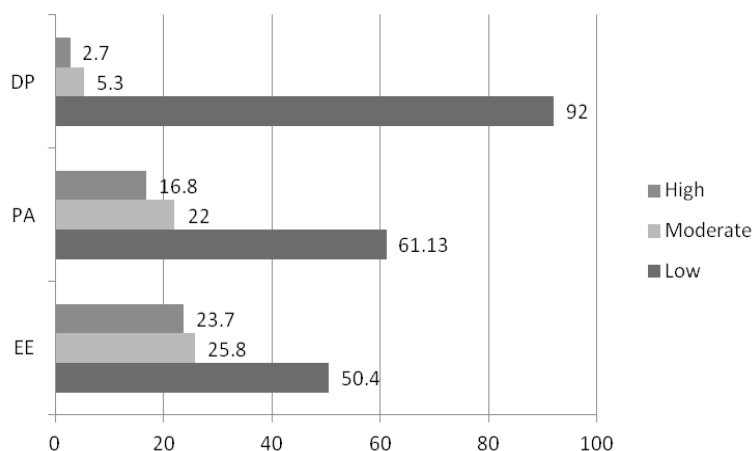


Figure 1: Teacher burnout according three subscales.

As the results showed the highest level of teacher high burnout was identified on Emotional Exhaustion (EE) subscale.

Teacher Burnout and Demographic Factors

Demographic factors such as teachers’ age, gender, level of education, working experience, social status were examined in relation to burnout subscales. Correlation was observed between gender and burnout subscales. Male teachers showed the higher level of burnout on Personal Achievement (PA) and Depersonalization (DP) subscales, whereas female teachers showed the higher level of burnout on Emotional Exhaustion (EE) subscale (Table 1).

Table 1. Teacher burnout subscales and gender (N/%).

		Gender			
		Male	Female		
PA (Personal Achievement)	High	7	20.0	62	18.7
	Moderate	5	14.3	71	21.4
	Low	23	65.7	199	59.9
EE (Emotional Exhaustion)	High	6	16.7	89	26.5
	Moderate	6	16.7	88	26.2
	Low	24	66.7	159	47.3
DP (Depersonalization)	High	4	11.1	9	2.7
	Moderate	1	2.8	16	4.7
	Low	31	86.1	312	92.6

Teacher Burnout and Student Number

Correlation was confirmed between burnout degree and number of students teacher had during a year (EE $p < 0.00$; PA $p < 0.01$). The higher the number of students - the higher is teacher burnout on Emotional Exhaustion (EE) and on Personal Achievement (PA) subscales. Figure 2 shows that burnout increases with the increase of student numbers.

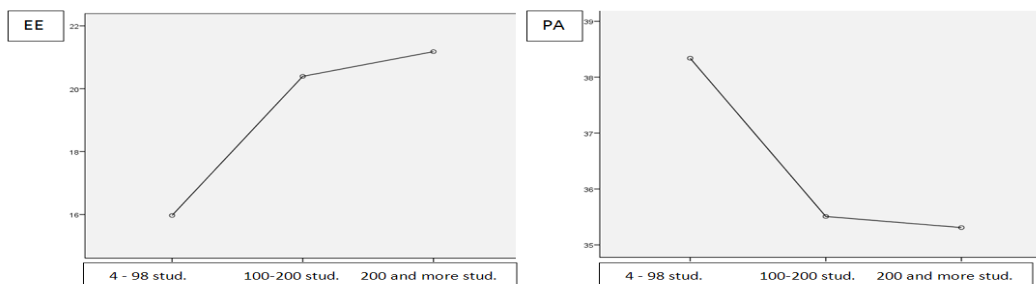


Figure 2: Correlation between teacher burnout subscales and student numbers.

Teacher Burnout and Locus Control

According to the research findings 46% of the surveyed teachers had internal locus control, 42% had mixed type and 12% had external locus of control. Analysis showed correlation between locus of control and EE and PA subscales of burnout, EE ($r = 0.193$; $p < 0.000$) and PA ($r = -0.150$; $p < 0.004$). Teachers with external locus of control were more prone to burnout (on EE subscale) than the teachers with internal locus of control ($p < 0.014$). Teachers having internal locus of control showed less burnout (on PA subscale) than the teachers with external locus of control ($p < 0.008$).

Teacher Burnout and School Climate

Correlations were examined among the three subscales of burnout and the six subscales of school climate. Principals' Supportive Behavior (SUP) was in negative correlation with teacher Emotional Exhaustion (EE) ($r = -0.224$, $p < 0.002$) and Depersonalization (DP) ($r = -0.334$, $p < 0.000$) and in positive correlation with Personal Achievements (PA) ($r = 0.270$, $p < 0.000$). Thus, when Principal revealed supportive behavior towards teachers, teachers' Emotional Exhaustion was less and Professional Achievements were high. Principals' Restrictive Behavior (RES) was in positive correlation with teachers' Emotional Exhaustion (EE) ($r = 0.273$, $p < 0.000$). This means that principals' restrictive behavior caused teacher exhaustion. Teachers Collegiality was in positive correlation with Personal Achievements (PA) ($r = 0.320$, $p < 0.000$) and in negative correlation with Depersonalization (DP) ($r = -0.261$, $p < 0.000$). Teachers' Commitment (COM) to students was in negative correlation with Depersonalization (DP) ($r = -0.239$, $p < 0.001$) and in positive correlation with Personal Achievements (PA) ($r = 0.284$, $p < 0.000$). Teachers Distancing from job (DIS) was in positive correlation with Emotional Exhaustion (EE) ($r = 0.182$, $p < 0.016$) and with Depersonalization (DP) ($r = 0.521$, $p < 0.000$). It was in negative correlation with Personal Achievements (PA) ($r = -0.343$, $p < 0.000$).

Discussion

Golembiewky, Munzenrider, Brill, Colwell, Dorling and other researchers (Brill, 1984; Caldwell & Dorling, 1991; Gmelch, 1993; Gold & Roth, 1993) noted that accumulation effect was characteristic for burnout. Accumulation effect may have taken place in this study as well. If compare Georgian teachers burnout data in 2011 (Bitsadze & Japaridze, 2011) and in 2012, on Emotional Exhaustion (EE), Personal Achievements (PA) and Depersonalization (DP) subscales in 2012 teachers showed higher percentage of high level burnout than in 2011.

Some research findings indicated that burnout was higher among novice teachers (Schwab, 1983). In this research this statement was not proved. A 36-49 year-old group of teachers having 4-10 teaching experience showed the highest Emotional Exhaustion (EE). Though it is noteworthy that 61.4 % of novice teachers (up to 23-35 years old) showed low level burnout. Because of accumulation effect higher level burnout can be expected in this group in future.

Only a small number of teachers had burnout on the Depersonalization subscale. Low Depersonalization results can be explained in various ways. First, it may confirm Maslach and Leiter's opinion about the dynamics of burnout arguing that Burnout starts with emotional exhaustion and depersonalization is its last stage. So, it can be stated that Georgian teachers do not experience deep burnout that ends with depersonalization stage. The second explanation can be rooted in the cultural peculiarities of Georgian teachers. Possibly, communications patterns and tradition of feelings exchange buffers depersonalization, though this can be a topic of further research.

Maslach's, Leiter's and others opinions regarding burnout and gender correlations was confirmed in this research. Female teachers experienced burnout on Emotional Exhaustion subscale whereas male teachers experienced burnout on Depersonalization and Personal Achievements subscales. This finding is noteworthy for policy makers as Georgian male teachers constitute only 14% of teacher population and if they do not see the personal achievement prospect in the profession, their number may continue to decrease.

The research findings regarding burnout correlation with student numbers is in line with Coats' and Thoresen's results. Teachers workload (big number of students) causes teacher burnout especially on Emotional Exhaustion (EE) and Personal Achievements (PA) subscales.

The research findings regarding the locus of control is also in line with McIntyre's, Maslach's and other researchers' results stating that teachers with internal locus are less prone to burnout. In particular, the correlation was proved on Emotional Exhaustion and Personal Achievements subscales.

LeCompte's, Dworkin's, Maslach's and other researchers opinions were also proved regarding school climate impact on teacher burnout. Results showed that Restrictive behavior (RES) from Principal side is correlated to teacher Emotional Exhaustion (EE), Principals' Supportive (SUP) behavior leads to less Emotional Exhaustion and Depersonalization. Teachers Collegial behavior is correlated with less Depersonalization.

It will be interesting to conduct burnout studies on school Principals and other school administrators. The further studies on teacher burnout may involve teachers, who on one side have already left school and teachers who have successfully coped with burnout. Longitudinal research on teacher burnout will be needed to deeper understand burnout phenomenon and factors having impact on it.

Conclusions

Research results confirmed that Georgian teachers experience burnout. High level burnout was identified on Emotional Exhaustion (EE) subscale (23.7%) and Personal Achievements (PA) subscale (16.8%).

The research also identified the impact of some personal and social factors on teacher burnout. In particular:

- Correlation was proved between teacher burnout level and personal factor such as locus of control. Teachers with external control locus were more likely to experience burnout than the teachers with Internal locus control;
- Correlation was proved between number of students teacher had to teach during a year and teacher professional burnout level. Large number of students was also one of the main factors for teacher burnout especially on emotional exhaustion and professional achievement reduction subscales.
- Differences were identified in the burnout of male and female teachers. In most cases female teachers experienced emotional exhaustion and male teachers - depersonalization and reduction of personal achievement;
- Correlation was confirmed between school climate and teacher burnout. School principals' directive style and restrictive behavior was directly connected with higher degrees of teacher burnout.

The research findings are important for planning the relevant interventions regarding teachers in educational reform process. Teacher burnout identification and its prevention is closely connected with teacher well-being and health that ultimately influences teaching quality and teacher attitude towards students.

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