

BURNOUT: A SERIOUS PROBLEM PREVALENT AMONG TEACHERS IN THE PRESENT TIMES

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Abstract

Every day, radical changes are taking place in the educational system. These changes are likely to increase rather than reduce the level of stress among teachers. Popular belief is that burnout is the result of excessive stress. It is a state of emotional, mental, and physical exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged stress. It occurs when one feels overwhelmed and unable to meet constant demands. It is the result not of stress, but of unmediated stress of not being able to cope with the stress, having no outlet for it, no buffer, no support-system, and no compensation. Burnout reduces one's productivity and saps energy, leaving one feeling increasingly helpless, hopeless, cynical, and resentful. Burnout is "a type of psychological distress - a chronic negative psychological condition that results as day-to-day work stressors take their toll" (Roloff and Brown, 2011). Teachers who experience burnout problem have mainly three categories of symptoms: Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalization, and Reduced Personal Accomplishment. No single factor can be found responsible for burnout problem. Various factors like level of stress, type of stress, personality, organizational climate, nature of job, life style, role style, coping style, and non-working life can be responsible in increasing the burnout problem among teachers. Some techniques which can be adopted to prevent burnout among teachers are also given in the article. As the quality and continuity of education are directly concerned with the phenomenon of teacher burnout, so intervention programs can be prepared in co-operation with administrators and counselors to prevent it.

Key Words: Burnout, Depersonalization, Emotional Exhaustion, Reduced Personal Accomplishment, Stress

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INTRODUCTION

“Of all the factors which determine the quality of education and its contribution to national development, teacher is undoubtedly the most important. It is on his personal qualities and character, his educational qualifications and professional competence that the success of all educational endeavors must ultimately depend”.

The National Policy on Education (1986)

A teacher occupies an important place in the educational process. In the field of education or in a specific teaching learning situation, teacher is the ultimate agent who dispenses knowledge, frames the time schedule, selects reading materials, plays the role of subject specialist, evaluates learning outcomes and helps pupils to overcome their difficulties and personal problems and thus plays an important role in the success of any educational programme. Educationists generally agree that the goodness of an educational programme is determined to a large extent by the quality of learning process. Whenever the learner failed to attain the pre-specified goals, something was wrong with the teacher, either with the plans he made or with the ways in which he carried them out. Again success of the learner mainly depends on the ability of the teacher. Dr. Radhakrishnan (1949) has aptly observed in this context, “The teacher’s place in the society is of vital importance. He acts as the pivot for the transmission of intellectual traditions and technical skills from generation to generation and helps to keep the lamp of civilization burning.” The role and responsibilities of a teacher are infinite and limitless. Radical changes are taking place in the area of educational system. These changes are likely to increase rather than reduce the level of stress in teachers. Teachers experience higher level of stress due to demanding situation, while dealing with students. Overcrowded classes, heavy syllabus and inadequate facilities make teachers’ work more complex. The education system has all the elements associated with stress: a bureaucratic structure, continuous evaluation of its processes and outcomes, and increasingly intensive interpersonal interactions with students, parents, colleagues, principals and the community. So, today teaching is considered a high-stress occupation.

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Teaching profession has historically been viewed as the label of love and kindness. It has many intrinsic and extrinsic rewards for people entering the pedagogical area. But in the present era, teaching is not without its inherent problems. Problems associated with job related stress remain at the top of many teachers' list. Nowadays, it has been transformed into a quite stressful occupation (Travers and Cooper, 1996). Due to RTE Act (2010) teachers are almost become handicapped. The Act has not mentioned anything about bringing discipline in the classroom. The Act says that students can be admitted up to 8th standard, appropriate of their age and it is the responsibility of the teacher to conduct bridge courses and take up remedial measures to help them reach their learning levels. This puts the teacher under tremendous stress, forcing many to shift their careers. Teaching is a highly stressful career, and teachers are leaving the profession at an alarming rate (Hanushek, 2007; Ingersoll, and Smith, 2003). Stress comes from the perception of a teacher that the resources available to deal with the stress are not adequate. Stress is a reality of teaching, which can be beneficial or harmful depending on how a person responds. Inability to cope with stress may make the individual unable to maintain the enthusiasm, care and commitment, he initially brought to the job and then the process of burnout begins. The concept of burnout emerged in the 1970s and still continues to be used at the present time. Many studies showed that teacher burnout and student dropout stem from the same source. So it was felt that for quality education, full utilization of human resources and to create a healthy environment for the development of students, this area required special attention and an attempt was made to study the problem of burnout prevalent among teachers in the present era.

BURNOUT

The term burnout was first introduced in academic scenario by Freudenberger (1974), who defined it as “to fail, to wear out, or become exhausted by making excess demands on energy, strength or resources”. Burnout, as a form of work-related strain, is the result of a significant accumulation of work-related stress. Maslach (1982) defined burnout as “a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who do ‘people work’ of some kind”. In general, burnout is a state of emotional, mental, and physical exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged stress. It occurs

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when one feel overwhelmed and unable to meet constant demands. It reduces one's productivity and saps energy, leaving one feeling increasingly helpless, hopeless, cynical, and resentful. Eventually, one may feel like he has nothing more to give. Kahn (1986) has explained burnout as "a syndrome of inappropriate attitudes towards clients and towards self often associated with uncomfortable physical and emotional symptoms as well as with deterioration of performance". Hendrix et al. (2000) defined burnout as a reaction to chronic stress which involves negative interactions between environmental and personal characteristics.

Burnout is a reaction to chronic stress. It is not a trivial problem but an important barometer of a major social dysfunction in the work place. Matheny Gfoerer, and Harris (2000) noted that earlier research in to the phenomenon described burnout as a loss of idealism and enthusiasm for work. The quality and continuity of education are directly concerned with the phenomenon of teacher burnout. The challenging aspect of burnout is that the principle factor in its development is the same factor which is often a good teacher's strength, namely dedication: Thus, the more dedicated teachers are to their job, the more likely they are to experience burnout (Brock and Grady, 2002). An educator who is experiencing burnout has low morale, low self-esteem, and is physically exhausted (Roloff and Brown, 2011). He said that burnout is "a type of psychological distress-a chronic negative psychological condition that results as day-to-day work stressors take their toll". He further explained that teachers who experience burnout have three categories of symptoms: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal achievement.

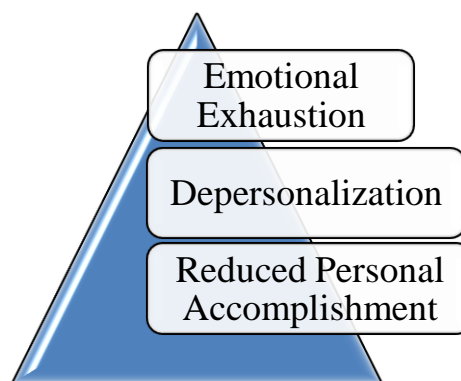


Fig. 1: Symptoms of Teacher Burnout

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Emotional exhaustion is experienced when a teacher feels as all of his “emotional resources are used up”. **Depersonalization** occurs when one separates himself from colleagues, family, and friends. Separation may manifest through a physical isolation or through distancing oneself emotionally. **Reduced personal accomplishment** is the tendency of the employee to evaluate his/her work negatively, an evaluation that is often accompanied by feelings of insufficiency. All the three symptoms related to burnout have also been shown in fig.1. The role of educators in the present era is very different as they need to be more adaptable with frequently changing policies, practices, and demands (Valli and Buese, 2007). Teachers must be facilitators of knowledge as well as managers and mentors of children (Pettersson, Postholm, Flem, and Gudmundsdottir, 2004). As noted in an ethnographic study by Bartlett (2004), while modern teacher roles have expanded in recent times, their structural supports have not. Teachers are now often responsible for assessing the school systems, educational practices, and curriculum development (Lieberman and Miller, 1999). All this shows a lot of stress for teacher which can result in burnout. How the teacher instructs has more relevance than what is taught. A teacher who is low on morale, high on frustration and is detached from the students obviously is not able to be effective in the classroom.

FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR BURNOUT

No single factor can be found responsible for burnout. Various factors are there which can result in burnout among teachers. Pareek (1982) has pointed out nine factors which lead to burnout i.e. a) level of stress b) type of stress c) personality d) organizational climate e) nature of job f) life style g) role style h) coping style i) non-working life. Stress either little or too much, it leads to hyper stress. It can be either functional (eustress) or dysfunctional (distress). Certain personality dimensions like sense of loneliness, externality, low self-esteem etc. has been found to be associated with burnout. Along with these personality factors organizational climate and nature of job are also associated with burnout. The patterns of structuring one’s time i.e. life style, dysfunctional coping styles which include fatalism, blaming, showing aggression etc., avoidance style: a type of role style are also correlated with the burnout tendency. These factors of burnout

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among teachers are also represented in figure 2.

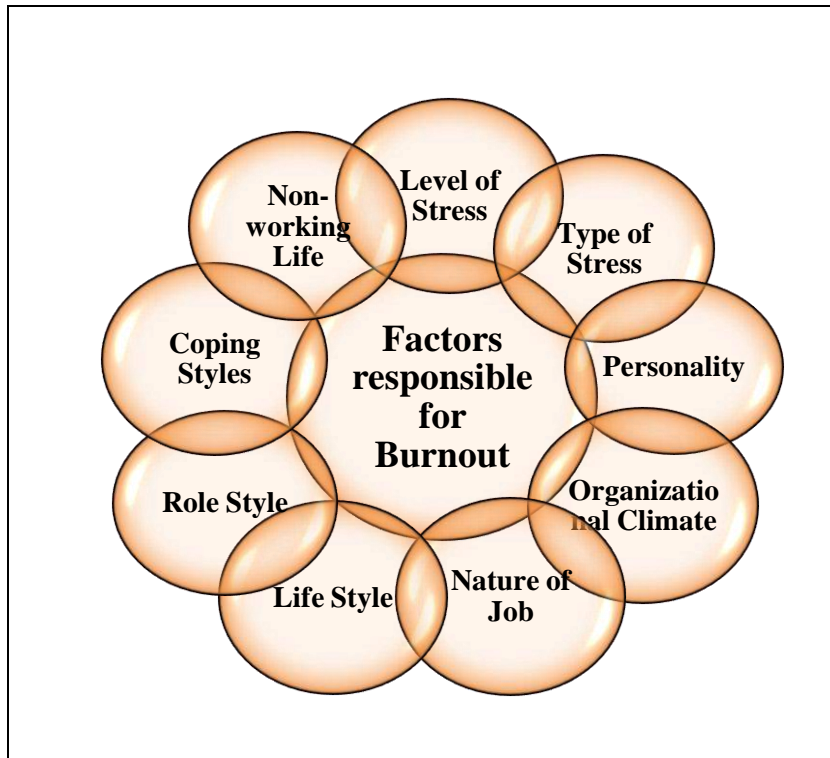


Fig. 2: Factors Responsible for Burnout

PREVENTION OF BURNOUT AMONG TEACHERS

Previous researches in the field pointed out that once teacher burnout has been developed, it is easier to prevent it rather than to reverse it. If one recognize the warning signs of impending burnout in himself / herself, it will get worse if he/she leave it alone. But if one take steps to get one's life back into balance, one can prevent burnout from becoming a full-blown breakdown. Tims, Bakker and Derks (2013) showed that employees who craft their own job demands and resources increase their levels of work engagement and reduce the risk of burnout. Recent research suggests that employees with only mild symptoms of burnout use a range of strategies e.g. selection, optimization, compensation (Bakker, Demerouti, and Leiter, 2014) to keep their job performance at acceptable levels. Besides studies related to factors leading to teacher burnout, studies related to its solutions and prevention strategies have also been conducted.

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Hendrickson (1979) discussed how to recognize teacher burnout and what to do about it. He offered seventeen suggestions for fighting burnout. Reed (1979) gave suggestions for preventing teacher burnout which include changing grade levels taught, building up self-esteem through positive reinforcement, involving teachers in decision making, promoting professional growth, releasing the pressure etc. A similar study was done by Zabel and Zabel (1982) describing burnout syndrome among special education teachers. They discussed burnout reducing techniques consisting of reduction of student-teacher ratio, shorter work hours, shared student load and training in stress management. Some techniques which can be used to prevent burnout problem are mention below:

- **Start the day with meditation:** One should start the day spending at least fifteen minutes mediating or reading something inspiring.
- **Develop healthy habits:** Development of healthy habits will provide energy to deal with life's hassles and demand.
- **Management of time:** Proper management of time will help in eliminating stress.
- **Have a break from technology:** Shut down all gadgets and relaxed your body and mind.
- **Avoid unnecessary stress:** Be positive and try to avoid unnecessary stress.
- **Be creative:** Thinking in creative manner will fill you with pleasure.
- **Have Realistic Goals:** Setting the goals high is motivating, but setting it too high can be stressful.
- **Avoid Conflicts:** Avoiding conflicts will save a lot of time and energy.
- **Believe in yourself:** Do not do others want. Take your own advice and do what you want.
- **Positive and optimistic attitude towards profession:** Positive thinking and optimistic attitude will make you free from stress.

Though the problem of burnout cannot be reversed, yet with the help of above mentioned techniques, it can be reduced or prevented to a large extent.

CONCLUSION

Teacher burnout is a psychological condition that leads to exhaustion, depersonalization, and decreased teacher achievement and self-worth (Raines, 2011). The present article not only

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explained burnout among teachers but also explained how teachers can actively work to prevent burnout and also provided some techniques that faculty can take in order to heal from burnout and return to their previous state of health and pedagogical success. Teachers should endeavor to attend stress-management interventions, not only for themselves but to understand others around them better. Intervention programs can be prepared in co-operation with administrators and counselors to prevent teachers' burnout. Employees with high levels of burnout need help in structurally changing their working conditions and health status, and we hope that the present article offers a framework with which this can be achieved.

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