

# Professional exhaustion among Teachers- A study on Burnout

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## ABSTRACT

Burnouts among teachers have always been a serious concern. As per the opinion provided by Roloff and Brown, (2011), "An educator who is experiencing burnout has low morale, low self-esteem, and is physically exhausted". The experiences of burnout have outlasted several generations. With every passing year, new ideas are strategized to lessen the physical and mental fatigue/exhaustion caused due to professional hazards among teachers. However, the occurrence of professional burnouts seems to escalate with every passing year. Introduction of new plans, rules and regulations for teachers inevitably creates more burnouts among teachers. Several such cases of dissatisfaction among teachers have been recorded in the world of academia. Irrespective of the fact that only teachers belonging to the strata of higher education face burnouts, teachers at the primary as well the tertiary level of education face it. However, discussing from the view point of distress faced by teachers, the latest definition of teachers' burnout was designed by Roloff and Brown (2011). According to the researchers, "Burnout is a type of psychological distress - a chronic negative psychological condition that results as day-to-day work stressors take their toll on educators". Estimating the amount of damage caused by the burnout, it becomes imperative to overtly discuss the causes, preventions and other necessary aspects of teachers' burnout.

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## 1. Introduction

A very well known definition of burnout was provided by Maslach and Jackson, (1981). As per the researchers, burned out people suffer from emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment. Where, 'Emotional exhaustion' refers to feelings of being emotionally overextended and having depleted one's emotional resources; 'Depersonalization' refers to a negative, callous and detached attitude towards the people one works with, i.e. patients, clients or students; and. 'Reduced Personal Accomplishment(RPA)' describes someone's negative self-evaluation in relation to their job performance (Schaufeli et al., 1993).

The utterance about professional burnout mainly came from psychiatrist Freudenberger (1975). His work in alternative health care agency helped him much in understanding and dealing with the problem of stress experienced by people from diverse profession. However, it was Maslach (1976) , a social psychologist, studied extensively on emotional depletion and stress experienced by people at workplace. The term 'Professional burnout' was coined by Freudenberger because according to him the uncomfortable feeling of constant stress and emotional depletion resembled to the feeling of continuous drug use.

Later, certain empirical study outcomes also agreed upon the fact that 'burnout stress' could be formally divided into certain categories. The most accepted categories were structured by Oranje (2001). According to the researcher, the first category pertained to coping of problems, known as '**The Interaction Model**'. As per this model burnout stems from the negative outcome of an individual's judgment of their own abilities in relation to real or imagined stressors in their environment (Byrne, 1991; Cherniss, 1980; Eskridge and Coker, 1985).

The second category of burnout pertained to both physical and mental exhaustion/tiredness that affects a person involved for a long time in a particular situation that is emotionally strenuous. This is referred as '**Response or Physiological Model**'.

The third category of burnout generates due to environmental hazards. Examples of such environmental stressors were demarcated by the researchers such as, social relationships of the teachers with students, colleagues and principals (Brouwers and Tomic, 1999; Feitler and Tokar, 1980), and the organizational working circumstances (Brenner et al., 1985; Burke and Richardsen, 1996; Van Dierendonck et al., 1998).

Teachers' burnout was well studied by Barnett, Brennan and Gareis (1999). As per the researchers professional burnout could lead to several detrimental physiological effects. Severe cases of alcohol use, lower moral status, illness, and reduced quality of service have been found. It has been found that teachers suffering from excessive stress in their professional arena vulnerable to have detrimental psychosomatic consequences. The physiological aspect of health especially takes toll on nervous, endocrine, and respiratory system.

Amen (2005) explained that the region of hypothalamus in the brain situated in the limbic area, releases a chemical known as corticotropin. This is often referred to as the **corticotropin-releasing factor (CRF)**. This acts as the signal to the pituitary gland during the time of any kind of emergency. The pituitary gland which plays a pivotal part in the endocrine system '**Adrenocorticotropin**' which again acts as the signaling factor to the adrenal gland which then pours in cortisol and adrenaline to the blood.. Amen says that, "**Cortisone/cortisol** and **Adrenaline**, also known as

**epinephrine**, are responsible for the “fight or flee” response in mammals” However, the high release of cortisol in blood creates numerous health problems among individuals. Amen (2005) also added that excessive fatigue, poor and broken concentration, elevated levels of bad cholesterol, and diabetes. Cortisol in excess amount in the body tends to lead to muscle wasting also known as Atrophy.

## 2. Causes and Prevention

Elias (2012) researched the most potent probable reasons for the cause of stress or rather the feeling of burnout among teachers. According to his research, five points were discretely stated, such as:-

- Lack of adequate preparation
- Lack of Autonomy
- Difficult Students’ behavior
- Lack of Support and Interpersonal conflict
- Boredom

Few other causes of burnout were enlisted by Cox (2016). As per the researcher teachers often faced extreme stress due to lack of sense of class-management; Pressure by administration; lack of support by administration; refuse to call in sick. Teachers from all sections and level of education shared the same reasons of burnout cause.

A very interesting research result was cited by Bauer (2006). Here, the researcher found that the women teachers were more susceptible to stress and burnout in professional arena. However a contradictory study in the following year showed male teachers to have higher level of burnout. Men were found to generate a sense of defeat more easily than their female counterpart. Male teachers were found to be more prone towards ego satisfaction. However again, in the next year a research stated that both genders i.e. male and female teachers, were affected when a sense of powerlessness or defeat when students could not be motivated for higher academic performance (Schrier, 2008). Students’ ill –behavior or problem behavior and learning disability were also found to be few robust reasons for teachers’ burnout (Fejgin, 2005).

Serious hazardous health outcomes due to burnout were projected by Martin, Sass, and Schmidt (2011). High level of stress was found to be positively correlated with depression and emotional disturbances. Likewise, Richards (2012) categorized the burnout’s fall-out effect into major categories, such as **physical exhaustion, loss of idealism and enthusiasm, sense of being overwhelmed and diminished teacher efficacy, negative impact on personal relationships, worry about job security, and psychosomatic symptoms like headaches, stomach aches, and high blood pressure.**

Richard (2012) also suggested that:

- Having good friends and family,
- A good sense of humor,
- Times of solitude,
- The belief that stress is a problem to be solved,
- And a positive attitude.

Although physical activity was found to be a powerful stress buster, exercise was not indicated as a top coping mechanism by the researcher (Rains, 2012). In fact, it was asserted by Raines (2012) that possession and cultivation of positive moral values by the teachers, building good rapport with the faculty members as well as students within the academic institutions (and beyond) was found to be healthy.

## 3. What is Burnout syndrome (BOS)?

The Burnout Syndrome (or group or signs) is a set of physical and mental symptoms including:-Exhaustion/fatigue; Headaches; Depression Anxiety Insomnia, excessive sleeping; and/or dysregulated body clock Chronic pain; Loss of appetite and/or difficulty digesting food (including slow stomach emptying)IBS (Irritable Bowel System) symptoms such as constipation and diarrhea; Difficulty regulating temperature, Feeling very cold without having a fever, and night Excessive perspiration; Abnormal hormone levels (including thyroid, cortisol and testosterone)Suppressed or altered immunity, including susceptibility to viral infections and increased allergic symptoms.

As per the definition provided by *American Journal of Respiration and Critical Care Medicines* , Burnout syndrome was defined as, “First described in the 1970s, BOS is a work-related constellation of symptoms that usually occurs in individuals without any prior history of psychological or psychiatric disorders. BOS is triggered by a discrepancy between the expectations and ideals of the employee and the actual requirements of their position. In the initial stages of BOS, individuals feel emotional stress and increasing job-related disillusionment”.

However, the most prominent features of ‘Burnout Syndrome’ were detected mainly to be three, as, **(1) Feeling of extreme exhaustion; (2) Depersonalization; and (3) Reduced personal achievement.**

## 4. Conclusion

Burnout is still a grave problem for the teachers’ fraternity. Even though the feeling of burnout stems out from professional grounds, its adverse effect are more or less reflected on personal lives of the teachers. Even though the much research in the field of pedagogy is taking place revolving burnouts among teachers, there is still a dearth in inventing the best coping strategy. Teachers burnout needs a serious consideration by education leaders; educational policy makers. It is true that teachers’ instability has a direct effect on the students’ well-being. Teachers will ill-temperament affects students motivation and enthusiasm for learning. Teachers being an important stakeholder of educational system in the society have to take the onus on themselves to combat the problem. Teachers’ instability affects student motivation and enthusiasm for learning, which is why it is important to identify and develop programs to help teachers learn to cope with burnout before it morphs into a larger problem such as mental attrition. Reducing teacher burnout promotes a constructive approach towards building stronger community that fosters life-long learners and benefits students, teachers and society (Jacobson, 2016).

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