

BURNOUT AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN NORTH MACEDONIA: DEMOGRAPHIC DIFFERENCES

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the study is to understand the relationship between school burnout and its outcomes to demographic differences. The research was conducted among university students in North Macedonia. 68 students between 18-30 years participated in the study in which 47.1% of them were male participants and 52.9% of them were female participants. School Burnout Inventory (SBI) was used for the survey. Participants also were required to answer demographic questions such as: gender, academic achievement, branch of science, and other questions. The first conclusion of the study was that there is no gender difference in burnout level. Another finding supported that Health Science students differ from the other students' burnout level. Lastly, study concluded that there is a significant difference between burnout and academic achievement in which students with lower academic achievement experience higher burnout.

Key Words: burnout, gender, branch of science, academic achievement.

1. INTRODUCTION

Burnout is widely a considered term referring to psychological syndrome of emotional exhaustion in particular circumstances, nowadays the term burnout might be captured mostly in work settings referring to over workload, desperation, inability to meet hierarchical needs of company and so forth. The concept of burnout was recognized about four decades ago by Michael Litterer, Christina Maslach and Herbert Freudenberger who are known as early pioneers of the burnout phenomenon. They defined burnout as "...a psychological syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who work with people in some capacity" (Maslach, Jackson & Leiter, 1996, p. 192).

Indeed, according to Maslach and Jackson (1981) the notion was originally applied to the human services profession, based on this assumption exhaustion occurs among provider and receiver parties in service/care (teaching, healthcare, social work) settings. These are tough and challenging industries that involve close relations with others along with considerable levels of expertise and empathy. Individuals who seek employment in service-related fields frequently have to have ambitious aspirations and an idealistic outlook (Schaufeli, Leiter & Maslach, 2009).

Later researchers have investigated whether burnout similarly affects various professional pursuits and occupations (Leiter & Schaufeli, 1996) and appointed that notion has additionally been applied to undergraduate and graduate students, since studying has some hallmarks of a profession and students encounter obstacles while fulfilling academic standards (Schaufeli et al., 2002). The concept of burnout has extended to educational settings and labeled as school burnout, in which academic variation of expression was coined to reflect the gradual exhaustion, cynicism, and loss of motivation seen in educational context. Due to

students facing numerous challenges along the path of reaching their desired academic goals, losing the motivation and feeling stressed seems prevalent, however burnout shall be distinguished from academic temporary stress, after high pressure periods are over if yet student have not found the courage to keep up with academic duties as assignments, following materials, attending classes over certain period, then, the likelihood of experiencing burnout is significantly higher.

According to ecological theory the concept of burnout is based on environmental factors, however individual characteristics are effective predictors in the adaptation period of young adults. Meaning school burnout is not affected by student strengths only, based on Kutsal and Bilge (2012) hypothesis, a balance of the expectations imposed on learners by their community, friends, and instructors, in conjunction with the support and guidance of their circles, are significantly effective in preventing the occurrence of burnout. This occurs in addition to the students' own attributes, strengths, and desires. In line with this approach, numerous studies in the literature (Halbesleben, 2006) also demonstrate that burnout inside the setting of the school ecosystem is associated with the support provided by peers and instructors, who are major societal actors in the immediate environment of the individual. Doubtlessly, if the student is provided with right social support and has built quality of communication with peers and environment the reduction of burnout is inevitable.

1.1. Dimensions of School Burnout

The classification of burnout as a multidimensional condition, resulted in three core symptoms: chronic exhaustion, cynicism (a distant attitude toward the job), and feeling of inadequacy (diminished productivity) (Maslach et al., 1986). Apparently, burnout's primary response is over exhaustion, where individuals feel either physically or psychologically drained and are incapable of finishing basic tasks. The forms of exhaustion could be emotional or physical exhaustion, where both forms are caused by prolonged and over exposure to stress, as the stress continues the student becomes unable to meet the academic demands and body and brain give responses such as; reduced energy, task escape and fatigue. On the other hand, depersonalization or cynicism reflects unwanted, detached and distanced responses to folks around, due to negative emotions felt toward institution, atmosphere, peers/lecturers or overall pressured feeling. Cynicism expels in the moment when a student is unable to meet expected schoolwork standards and build defense mechanisms in a way by being indifferent and developing a non-positive attitude toward the work. The final dimension, professional inefficacy or sense of inadequacy is defined as diminished school efficacy, incapability of using motivational factors as well as losing confidence in one's abilities (Maslach & Leiter, 1997). It is closely connected with the feeling of incompetence, inferiority which further led to overall dissatisfaction of the school environment, poor achievement performance. Inability of using both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational resources, loss of enthusiasm and doubting in self-efficacy are few factors impacting the learner's academic goal achievement pace and inquiring about one's own academic abilities. All three components correspond to energy (e.g., feeling drained), attitude (e.g., being cynical), and sense of inadequacy (e.g., doubting interpersonal capabilities) (Schaufeli, 2003). Likewise, for the student target group, burnout elements are outlined similarly, and they pertain to feeling exhausted due to study pressures, having a cynical and detached attitude toward studies, feeling inadequate and inefficient as a learner (Schaufeli et al., 2002).

On the other hand, when digging to underlying factors in causes of school burnout a number of determinants could be listed; external factors as learning difficulties, parental pressure and pre-existing mental disorganizations are closely correlated with burnout (Salmela-Aro, Savolainen & Holopainen, 2009). Either self-disbelief, disturbed mental homeostasis, internal locus of control (blaming the self for happenings), demotivation are internal factors that play a barrier role in student` academic performance. Additionally, in the light of previous researches severity of school related stress have been proved that varies by gender (girls show higher exhaustion tendency), by grading (learners in post-pre transition grades has higher risk) and lastly school tracks (student in academic tracks are more at burnout risk), (Meylan, Doudin, Curchod & Stephan,

2011). Moreover, it is worth mentioning that according to Shankland et al. (2019), student burnout has evolved into a public health matter in the past decade. Since burnout recently peaked in raising anxiety levels, depression risk, unhealthy habits, insomnia, absenteeism, alcohol and drug use and dropping out indeed been closely associated with internalized issues including acute traumatic episodes, some somatic symptoms and suicidal thoughts.

Student who strives for scholastic excellence report higher level of exhaustion comparing to those who aspire to master their subject of study, likewise, it appears that learners who are under pressure academically and concerned over their career prospects experience particularly high levels of tiredness and inferiority complexes (Tuominen-Soini, Salmela-Aro & Niemivirta, 2008). Yet, transitions are crucial stages for the beginning or progression of burnout, particularly for youngsters who are pursuing higher academic pathways. In contrast, a mild school atmosphere, higher self-efficacy, and a sense of productivity are few factors associated with lower burnout level (Salmela-Aro & Upadyaya, 2014).

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Sample and Procedure

This research is conducted using a sample of students from both private and public universities in North Macedonia and both from undergraduate and graduate studies. The participants received the survey in Google Form which was available from June until September 2023. The data was analyzed using the SPSS 20 version. The sample was collected randomly. 68 participants from private and public universities participated in the survey. 32 of the participants were male(47.1%) and 36 of them were female (52.9%). When it comes to the branch of science, the most of the participants were from Social Sciences (32 total participants with 47.1%), the second most participants were from Health Sciences (15 total participants with 22.1%). Moreover, from humanities there were only 10 participants (14.7%), while 9 of the participants were from technical sciences (13.2%). Lastly, only 2 of the participants were from natural sciences (2.9%). To assess academic achievement, participants were required to provide their GA scores. Through this, their academic achievements were obtained. The number of participants that have a lower academic achievement (between 6 to 8 GA score) was 26 (38.2%). On the other hand, 42 (61.8%) of the participants have a higher academic achievement (between 8 to 10 GA score). The demographic data is given in Table 1.

		Number	Percentage
<i>Gender</i>	Male	32	47.1%
	Female	36	52.9%
<i>Branch of Science</i>	Social Sciences	32	47.1%
	Technical Sciences	9	13.2%
	Health Sciences	15	22.1%
	Humanities	10	14.7%
	Natural Sciences	2	2.9%

<i>Academic Achievement</i>	Lower Academic Achievement	26	38.2%
	Higher Academic Achievement	42	61.8%

Table 1. Demographic Data

3. Instrument

The questionnaire included two parts. The first part contained demographic questions, while the second part contained School Burnout Inventory (SBI). The School Burnout Inventory was developed by Salmela-Aro, Kiuru, Leskinen, Nurmi (2009). The inventory is composed of 9 items that are scored by 6-point Likert scale ranging from (1 = completely disagree, 6 = completely agree). The Inventory analyzes three theoretically-derived elements of student exhaustion from academic expectancy (four items), overall feeling of inadequacy related to schoolwork (two items) and detached and cynical mindset of one's school (three items).

4. RESULTS

To measure the differences between burnout and demographic differences, independent samples t-test and one-way ANOVA analyses were used.

Result Number 1

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
<i>Burnout</i>	Equal Variances Assumed	.828	.366	.625	66	.534
	Equal Variances not Assumed			.630	65.955	.531

Table 2. t-test for burnout and gender

In Table 2., an independent sample t-test result is shown for the difference between burnout and gender. According to the table, there is no difference between burnout and gender ($p=.534$)

Result Number 2

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
<i>Between Groups</i>	1060.793	4	265.198	4.719	.002
<i>Within Groups</i>	3540.324	63	56.196	4.719	
<i>Total</i>	4601.118	67			

Table 3. one-way ANOVA for burnout and branch of science

In Table 3, a one-way ANOVA result is shown and according to the results there is a significant difference between burnout and branch of sciences ($p=.002$). Hereby, according to post-hoc Tuckey results, it was found that Health Sciences was significantly different from the other study areas ($p=.004$).

Result Number 3

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		
		F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
<i>Burnout</i>	Equal Variances Assumed	5.835	.018	3.127	66	.003
	Equal Variances not Assumed			3.438	65.700	.001

Table 4. t-test for burnout and academic achievement

In Table 4, independent sample t-test analysis results are shown. According to the results, there is a significant difference between burnout and academic achievement ($p=.003$). Students with lower academic achievement have higher mean scores (36.96) than students with lower academic achievement (30.88).

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

School burnout is a serious concern when considering today's higher education conditions. School burnout is a less comprehensive concept compared to job-related burnout which researchers were mainly focused on. The school burnout concept's relevance is newly investigated and so far, explored, and has plenty of consequences to student academic performance as well as mental well-being. So, the purpose of this study was to obtain the differences between burnout and demographic changes among the university students, which might be a detrimental psychological phenomenon for the academic and personal lives of the students.

According to the results, it was found that there is no difference between gender and their burnout level. This means that both genders (males and females) might experience the same level of burnout through their studies. Burnout can be seen in both genders which might be correlated with their well-being.

Moreover, a second analysis which was aimed to measure differences between burnout and branch of science, resulted in students who study in Health Sciences such as departments: medicine, pharmacy, radiology, dentistry, and other departments experience higher burnout levels than other branches. This might be interpreted that Health Science is the most demanding branch of science than the other branches Natural Science (Molecular Biology, and other departments) is the second most demanding branch of science. Technical Science (Computer Engineering, Electronic Engineering, Architecture, and other departments) is the third most demanding science than the others. Social Science (Psychology, Economy, Speech Pathology, Law, and other departments) according to the result is the fourth most demanding branch. Lastly, according to the results Humanities (English Language Teaching, Graphic Design, and other departments), is the least demanding branch than the others.

Nevertheless, the research also found a significant difference between burnout and academic achievement in which students with lower academic achievement experienced higher levels of burnout than students with higher academic achievement. This can be interpreted that students with high levels of burnout cannot concentrate on their studies which might be destructive for their academic achievement through their studies. Limitations of the study might be sample size and language. The study in a bigger sample might give other results. Also, since English is not the mother tongue for all of the participants, some of the questions might be perceived differently.

It can be concluded that burnout shows differences in demographic differences among university students in North Macedonia. The future studies should focus on other demographic differences of burnout which might have a relationship (such as private/public institute, year of study, undergraduate/graduate studies, and other demographic differences).

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