

# PROFESSIONAL BURNOUT AND BALANCE BETWEEN WORK AND FAMILY LIFE AMONG TEACHERS<sup>15</sup>

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## **Abstract**

With this research can be concluded that teachers with higher professional burnout have a lower degree of balance between work and family life. This implies that schools should pay more attention to the professional burnout in their employees, because it is not only that it is perceived in their work but also in the overall quality of their lives or in the balance between work and family life.

The research offers opportunities for further investigation of the causes of the established relationship. It also provides direction in deeper examination of the given problem.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Many teachers find the demands of being a professional educator in today's schools difficult and at times stressful. When work stress results in teacher burnout, it can have serious consequences for the health and happiness of teachers, and also the students, professionals, and families they interact with on a daily basis.

## **THE NATURE OF THE STRESS RESPONSE**

When a potentially threatening event is encountered, a reflexive, cognitive balancing act ensues, weighing the perceived demands of the event against one's perceived ability to deal with them (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Events perceived as potential threats trigger the stress response, a series of physiological and psychological changes that occur when coping capacities are seriously challenged. The most typical trigger to the stress response is the perception that one's coping resources are inadequate for handling life demands. According to current models of stress, we are constantly taking the measure of the daily demands we experience in life and comparing this to the resources we possess for dealing with them. If our resources appear equal to the demands, we view them as mere challenges. If, however, demands are viewed as exceeding our resources, they become stressors and trigger the stress response. Accordingly, teacher stress may be seen as the perception of an imbalance between demands at school and the resources teachers have for coping with them (Esteve, 2000; Troman & Woods, 2001). Symptoms of stress in teachers can include anxiety and frustration, impaired performance, and ruptured interpersonal relationships at work and home (Kyriacou, 2001). Researchers (Lecompte & Dworkin, 1991; Farber, 1998; Troman & Woods, 2001) note that teachers who experience stress over long periods of time may experience what is known as burnout.

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<sup>15</sup> Original scientific paper

## PREVENTION OF BURNOUT

Albee (2000), one of the pioneers of prevention research, points out that, "It is accepted public health doctrine that no disease or disorder has ever been treated out of existence" (p. 847). It is far better if the roots of teacher burnout are identified and eliminated before the syndrome develops, rather than treating it after it has already occurred. Across the various medical professions, a distinction has been made between three levels of prevention interventions: (a) Primary prevention, where the goal is to reduce the incidence of new cases of a disorder, (b) secondary prevention, where the goal is early identification and treatment of symptoms before they turn into a full-blown disorder, and (c) tertiary prevention, where persons who have recently suffered a disorder receive some type of intervention to prevent relapse (Conyne, 1991). Such preventative interventions may either be done at the organizational level, with changes in the school environment, or at the individual level, in which the goal is to strengthen teachers' resources for resisting stress.

## RESEARCH

Starting from the research problem, it is defined the following research hypothesis: Teachers with higher professional burnout (exhaustion and distance from work) have a lower degree of balance between work and family life (the ability for flexible family readiness for flexibility of the family, the ability to work on flexibility, willingness to work flexibility).

### Questionnaires

The Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (OLBI) was originally developed in German. For the present research, the OLBI was translated into Dutch and then back-translated to German. The OLBI measures burnout with two dimensions: exhaustion and disengagement. The eight items of the exhaustion sub-scale are generic, and refer to general feelings of emptiness, overtaxing from work, a strong need for rest, and a state of physical exhaustion. Example items are "After my work, I regularly feel worn out and weary", and "After my work, I regularly feel totally fit for my leisure activities" (reversed) (1 = strongly disagree, 4 = strongly agree). Disengagement refers to distancing oneself from the object and the content of one's work and to negative, cynical attitudes and behaviors toward one's work in general. This sub-scale also comprises eight items, including "I frequently talk about my work in a negative way", and "I get more and more engaged in my work" (reversed). The answering categories are the same as for exhaustion. For both sub-scales, four items are positively worded and four items are negatively worded.

2. *Measure of Boundary Flexibility for the Work and Family Domains* consisted from family flexibility-ability, work flexibility-ability, family flexibility-willingness, and work flexibility-willingness.

### Sample

In this research was used a convenience sample of 73 subjects (60 female, 16 male) who are teachers employed in primary schools in Skopje. The average age of respondents was 45.3 years with a standard deviation  $SD = 11,38$ .

### Results

The dimensions of the variables balance between work and family life and professional burn out are defined measures of central tendency and variability.

Table 1. Descriptive for professional burn out

Dimensions	N	Min	Max	M	SD
physical exhaustion	73	10	32	20.78	4.86
Disengagement	73	23	50	36.25	6.34

Table 2. Descriptive for Boundary Flexibility for the Work and Family Domains

Dimensions	Number of questions	N	Min	Max	M	SD
family flexibility-willingness	6	73	6	42	22.99	8.09
family flexibility-ability	5	73	6	35	23.92	6.46
work flexibility-willingness	4	73	5	24	14.85	5.04
work flexibility-ability	4	73	4	22	11.69	4.44

Table 3. Correlation between professional burnout and Boundary Flexibility for the Work and Family Domains

Dimensions	Disengagement	physical exhaustion
work flexibility-ability	.186	.149
work flexibility-willingness	.248*	.208
family flexibility-ability	.382**	.148
family flexibility-willingness	.166	-.011

Based on the results obtained under the assumption that teachers with a higher level of professional burnout (exhaustion and distance from work) have a lower degree of balance between work and family life our hypothesis is partially accepted.

## SUMMARY

Burnout results from the chronic perception that one is unable to cope with daily life demands. Given that teachers must face a classroom full of students every day, negotiate potentially stressful interactions with parents, administrators, counselors, and other teachers, contend with relatively low pay and shrinking school budgets, and ensure students meet increasingly strict standards of accountability, it is no wonder many experience a form of burnout at some point in their careers. Efforts at primary prevention, in which teachers' jobs are modified to give them more control over their environment and more resources for coping with the demands of being an educator, are preferable over secondary or tertiary interventions that occur after burnout symptoms have surfaced. However, research reviewed here indicates each type of prevention can be useful in helping teachers contend with an occupation that puts them at risk for burnout.

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