



# **The Perceived Levels of Burnout and Job Satisfaction of Qatari General and Special Education Teachers**

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## **Abstract**

*The purpose of the present study was to examine perceived levels of burnout and job satisfaction of Qatari general and special education teachers. 80 hundred teachers participated in the study. 40 were working in the public schools, 40 in special education school. Participants were administered the Employees Satisfaction Inventory (ESI, Koustelios and Bagiatis, 1997) and the emotional exhaustion subscale of the Maslach's Burnout Inventory (MBI, Maslach and Jackson, 1986). Results showed that Qarari teachers experienced moderate levels of emotional exhaustion. Public school teachers were more satisfied from the job itself and their immediate supervisor than their counterparts in the Special Education Schools..*

**Keywords:** Burnout, job satisfaction, Qatari , general and special education teachers

## **Introduction**

Most teachers begin their careers excited and genuinely care for their students. However, over time they can lose that feeling. Teaching can be an incredibly fulfilling occupation but at the same time can be very stressful. Teachers interact with students, parents, and coworkers which can lead to stress. Teacher stress is defined by Kyriacou (2001) as “the experience by a teacher of unpleasant emotions, such as tension, frustration, anxiety, anger, and depression, resulting from aspects of work as a teacher.” Teacher stress may be perceived as the imbalance between demands at school and the resources teachers have for coping with them (Troman & Woods, 2001). Anxiety and frustration, impaired performance, and ruptured interpersonal relationships at work and home can be symptoms of teacher stress (Kyriacou, 2001). Researchers (Troman and Woods, 2001) note that teachers who experience stress over long periods of time may experience what is known as burnout.

Research in different cultures indicates that school teachers are among those professionals with the highest level of job stress (Stoeber & Rennert, 2008). As a result, many teachers experience burnout, decreased job satisfaction, and choose early retirement (e.g., Cano-Garcia, Padilla-Munoz, & Carrasco-Ortiz, 2005; Hakanen, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2006). The causes of stress may include increased workload, students with behavioural problems, problem in the parent–teacher relationship, conflicts in cooperating with colleagues, lack of support from the school leadership, and lack of autonomy (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007).

Satisfied teachers expected to hold their jobs longer, to be able to engage in more responsive, positive and consistent interaction with children, and to influence positively students' performance (Maslach and Leiter, 1999). Thus, it is easy to understand why burnout and job satisfaction among teachers continues to be an enduring research issue. According to Lease (1998) job satisfaction can be viewed as the degree of an employee's affective orientation toward the work role occupied in the organization. Research on teachers' job satisfaction orientation toward the work role occupied in the organization. Research on teachers' job satisfaction suggests that educators are most satisfied from the teaching itself and their supervision and dissatisfied from their salary and promotional opportunities (Dinham and Scott, 2000).

These findings seem to be robust across several different countries and cultural contexts (Koustelios, 2001). As far as early educators are concerned Fenech (2006) reported poor work conditions, low salaries, heavy workloads, unrealistic expectations from managers, low professional status, organizational conflict, and reduced autonomy. Another important aspect of teachers' well-being is experienced levels of burnout. Burnout can be defined as the inability of the employee to function effectively in her/his job and it has been conceived as a syndrome comprising three distinct elements: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and diminished personal accomplishment ( Maslach et al., 2001). It is considered to be the final

step of prolonged and extensive exposure to job related stress. Initially research on burnout focused on human services and education where employees work intensively with other people. However, later on it expanded to a variety of other occupations, such as managers or computer programmers as well as non-occupational areas of life (e.g., athletic sports, political activism) (Maslach, 1999).

In comparison to different occupations, teaching has been characterized as an extremely stressful profession. Numerous studies indicate that teachers, often suffering burnout. Maslach et al. (2001) reported that teachers have the highest level of emotional exhaustion, whereas the other two components are close to average. Burned out educators are unable to deal successfully with the overwhelming emotional stress of teaching (Brouwers and Tomic, 2000). This failure to cope can be manifested from impaired performance, absenteeism or various types of personal problems, and the deleteriously impact on the learning procedure (Manlove, 1993).

Although burnout has been conceptualized as a three dimension syndrome, several authors seem to agree that emotional exhaustion subscale is the essential component of burnout (Koeske and Koeske, 1989; Shirom and Ezrachi, 2003). The other two dimensions, namely depersonalization and diminished personal accomplishment are regarded as different, but theoretically related variables, which accompany emotional exhaustion (Koeske and Koeske, 1989; Shirom and Ezrachi, 2003). Moreover, past research has showed that emotional exhaustion could predict personal accomplishment and depersonalization (Lee and Ashforth, 1993). Based on the above considerations it is not surprising that emotional exhaustion is often used as the central measure of burnout phenomenon (Stremmel et al., 1993).

The existing body of literature on early educators' burnout show ambiguous evidence. It is well established that a consequence of burnout syndrome is turnover (Maslach and Leiter, 1999). Although some authors reported high degree of turnover among child care staff (Boyd and Schneider, 1997; Whitebook et al., 1993), others found low burnout levels (Manlove, 1993; Stremmel et al., 1993). For example, Jorde-Bloom (1986) pointed out that child care work is among the ten-top job categories which have the highest turnover. On the other hand, Stremmel et al. (1993) reported low emotional exhaustion levels for child care centers staff (directors, teachers and assistant teachers) (12.90 – 15.37).

Higher burnout levels were found in a study conducted in Canada among child care providers (20.99 for the emotional exhaustion subscale). Thus, the prevalence of burnout among early education staff might vary across different cultural or educational contexts. Additional studies, especially outside Northern America, are needed to address this issue. Much has been written about teacher burnout and job satisfaction in education.

The vast majority of that literature refers to teachers from elementary, intermediate, and secondary education (e.g., Byrne, 1991, 1994; Koustelios, 2001; Koustelios and Tsigilis, 2005). However, little systematic research has been conducted regarding early educators (Stremmel et al., 1993).

Even more scarce are research activity regarding early childhood professionals working in the Greek educational setting. Early educators have unique characteristics which differentiate them from the other educators.

For example, early educators have to teach indoors as well as outdoors. They are expected to be emotionally available and to expend lot of energy over long periods of time. Moreover, the inherent increased mobility of infants creates organizational problems and demands constant alertness for their safety. Additional research activity may offer an

evaluation of the levels of burnout and job satisfaction as they exist for early educators and provide the bases for future interventions strategies. Various factors such as job characteristics (e.g., work overload, time pressure), occupational characteristics (e.g., various types of work), organizational characteristics (role ambiguity, role conflict), background characteristics (e.g., age, gender), personality characteristics (e.g., locus of control, self-esteem) have been studied in relation to both concepts (e.g., Byrne, 1994; Dinham and Scott, 2000; Koustelios, 2001; Maslach et al. 2001).

For example Byrne (1994) has examined the burnout in a large sample of elementary, intermediate and secondary teachers in relation to organizational and personality factors. Organizational factors included role conflict, role ambiguity, work overload, classroom climate, decision making and social support. Maslach (1999) claimed that job factors are more strongly associated to burnout than personality or back ground characteristics. Indeed, issues related to the characteristics of the work setting are likely to affect how staff felt about their job and whether they experience burnout. An important job factor, which received little attention, is whether teachers are working in the public or private sector. Given the different work characteristics (e.g., organizational culture, social support) of these two sectors it seemed worthwhile to be studied for differences or similarities in relation to either burnout and/or job satisfaction.

The purpose of the present study was to examine the perceived levels of experienced burnout and job satisfaction in a sample of Qatari teachers across two different workplaces, general schools, and special education schools.

## **Method**

### *Participants*

Eighty teachers participated in the study. Their mean age was 38.12 (SD = 8.01) years and they had 12.22 (SD = 6.33) years working experience. 40 were working in the public schools, 40 in special education school.

### *Instruments*

*The emotional exhaustion subscale of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI)* (Maslach and Jackson, 1986) was used to measure early childhood teachers' levels of burnout. Although burnout is described as a syndrome comprised three distinct components (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment) emotional exhaustion has been characterized as its core element (Maslach et al., 2001).

Emotional exhaustion subscale comprises nine items which describe feelings of being emotionally overextended and exhausted by one's work. Each respondent was requested to indicate the frequency of the feeling represented by each item on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 0 (never) to 6 (every day). Higher values on experienced emotional exhaustion indicate higher degree of burnout.

*Employee Satisfaction Inventory (ESI, Koustelios and Bagiatis, 1997).* ESI is a multifaceted instrument for assessing six aspects of employees satisfaction: the work itself (4 items, e.g., My job is worth-while), pay (4 items, e.g., Paid for what I do), promotion (3 items, e.g., Good opportunities), supervision (4 items, e.g., My supervisor stands up for me), working conditions (5 items, e.g., Best I ever had), and organization as a whole (4 items, e.g., The organization looks after its employees). Responses are given to 5- point scale anchored by strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1).

### Procedure

The ESI and MBI's emotional exhaustion subscale were administered to teachers . The participation in the study was voluntary. Furthermore, the participants were assured that their responses to the questionnaire would be held in strict confidence and they will be used only for academic purposes.

### Results

Mean values and standard deviations are presented in Table 1. Independent sample t-test showed significant differences regarding “pay” and “immediate supervisor”, favoring general education teachers working in the public schools.

	<b>General Schools</b>	<b>Especial education schools</b>	<b>Overall</b>	
	M(SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)	n <sup>2</sup>
Emotional exhaustion	21.22 (11.0)	22.94 (10.0)	21.88 (10.6)	.006
Working conditions	4.06 (.71)	3.93 (.81)	4.01 (.75)	.007
Pay	3.18 (1.13)*	2.23 (1.1)	2.82 (1.21)	.137
Promotion	3.05 (1.15)	3.26 (1.08)	3.13 (1.12)	.010
Job itself	4.47 (.60)	4.33 (.76)	4.42 (.67)	.009
Immediate supervisor	4.34 (.74)*	3.95 (1.02)	4.19 (.88)	.053
Organization as a whole	3.57 (.96)	3.36 (.94)	3.49 (.96)	.008

Note: \* p < .01

### Discussion

This study was primary designed to investigate the perceived levels of burnout and job satisfaction of teachers working with school age children, in the Qatari educational setting. Based on the teachers' norms provided by Maslach and Jackson (1986), teachers experience emotional exhaustion levels seemed to above the average. This finding is in contrast with previous studies conducted among child care staff which reported low levels of burnout. However, Schaufeli and Dierendock (1995) pointed out that one should be extremely cautious when using cut-off points for the classification of burnout levels because these points may vary from country to country due to many social and cultural reasons.

Unfortunately, there has not been yet any systematic research to determine specific cut-off points for Qatari teachers. Therefore, Qatari teachers' levels of emotional exhaustion should be interpreted with caution.

Mean values on job satisfaction indicated that early professionals were most satisfied from the ESI facets “the job itself” and “immediate supervisor” followed by the “working conditions”. As was expected, they were dissatisfied from the economic compensation they receive. These results are in line with prior studies from various countries (Dinham and Scott, 2000; Koustelios, 2001; Oshagbemi, 1999) and provide additional support to Koustelios (2001) notion that cultural differences may not be existed when job satisfaction is studied. The above findings are encouraging and show that teachers continue to strive to provide high learning environment and have reasons to remain in the field despite the emotional exhaustion they perceive and their dissatisfaction from their salaries.

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