

Burnout: Addressing Work Related Stressors in Grant Focused Institutions

Vetta L Sanders Thompson, PhD

Washington University in St. Louis, Brown School

November 1, 2022

OBJECTIVES

Participants will:

- 1. Identify the signs of burnout,
- 2. Identify the factors that produce burnout, particularly at grant-based institutions.
- 3. Discuss organizational practices that might prevent burnout.
- 4. Discuss organizational changes to address burnout.

Definition of Burnout

“Burnout is a state of physical, emotional and mental exhaustion resulting from a prolonged response to long-term exposure to demanding situations.”

This is a psychological syndrome with three dimensions:

- Emotional exhaustion,
- Cynicism, and
- Perception of reduced personal accomplishment or professional efficacy

(Nathan C. Hall & Alenoush Saroyan, p 133)

Aspects of Burnout

Aspects:

- Emotional Exhaustion – this core component includes fatigue, feeling depleted of emotional energy
- Cynicism – negative attitudes & feelings towards others
- Sense of reduction in personal accomplishments – dissatisfaction with occupational achievements

Feel:

- Discouraged,
- Unmotivated,
- Distant from work, coworkers & organization

Physical Signs of Burnout

- Insomnia – chronic stress can interfere with the neurological and hormonal systems that regulate sleep.
- Exhaustion – Naps do not work or result in restoration of energy.
- Changes in eating habits – stress hormones can affect appetite; less hungry than usual when stressed, more when stress alleviates.
- Stomach aches – Swedish study found 67% of patients diagnosed with “exhaustion disorder” reported nausea, gas, or indigestion.
- Headache – Swedish study found 65% reported headaches.

The Problem

- **Over the last 20 years academia has changed.**
- **Competition has increased due to:**
 - Increased demands for accountability,
 - Decreases in funding sources,
 - Competition for students and the adoption of a student as consumer model,
 - Erosion of faculty job security, as more positions are adjunct or contract and core faculty ranks are reduced.

The Problem

Academic Burnout Now

- University and college research and teaching academics at different ranks and tenure status are reporting high levels of burnout.
 - Level comparable to teachers and medical professionals,
 - Burnout among these professionals has been generally seen as particularly high.

Why Does Burnout Happen?

In general:

- Emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion brought on by excessive and prolonged stress.
- Occurs when you feel overwhelmed, unable to meet ongoing demands, and are emotionally drained.
- It is related to chronic workplace stress that is not well managed.

C. Maslaugh, W. B. Schaufeli, M. P. Leiter, 1997

**Think &
Share**

Think – What do you see as the reasons and causes for burnout in research intensive academic settings?

Share – Large group share

Why Research Focus)ed Institutions

Work Overload

- Multiple roles and job tasks - research, teaching, mentoring, service (institutional and professional)
- Negative feedback – manuscripts, grants, presentations
- Lack of control of outcomes –impacts that result from the type of work that we do (manuscripts, grants, interventions, studies)
- Variety of constituents interact with –students of different levels, staff, administrators, funders, external colleagues
- Always on due to emails, cellphones, direct messaging

Why Research Focused Institutions

Grant writing takes patience, brain power, and creativity to:

1. Find funding opportunities;
2. Develop a quality research question/program/intervention;
3. Write a successful proposal.

Theoretical Framework

Leading Theory – The Job Demands-Resources Model

Job demands

- Job social, organizational & physical features involving continuous mental or physical efforts
- Associated with potential psychological/physical costs such as exhaustion and fatigue.

Resources

- buffer or reduce job demands or their corresponding detrimental impacts,
- facilitate the employee's growth and development and
- assist in achieving work-related goals

Theoretical Framework

Theory & empirical evidence indicate the importance of six workplace demands & resources:

1. workload,
2. control,
3. value,
4. fairness,
5. reward
6. community

Systematic Review Findings

Demographic Factors:

More than ½ of the studies reviewed examined the effect of demographic characteristics on faculty burnout - age, gender, years of experience, and academic rank/status.

- Age -consistent relationship with burnout; a significant negative relationship between age & emotional exhaustion, older faculty members reported lower levels of exhaustion.
- It has been said that female faculty have a higher rate of burnout, review found inconsistent & contradictory differences.
- There is limited empirical evidence concerning the impact of years of experience on faculty burnout. Inconsistent with one study indicating younger faculty more at risk.

Systematic Review Findings

Job Demands

1. Job demands were consistently found to predict higher levels of faculty burnout.
2. High workload & amount of assigned work are positive predictors of faculty burnout.
3. Work overload & pressure consistently significant predictors of greater burnout.
4. Role ambiguity associated with lower perceived accomplishment.
5. Lack of role clarity was shown to predict greater emotional exhaustion.

Systematic Review Findings

Job Resources

1. Social support was the most frequently examined antecedent of burnout.
2. Higher levels of organizational support from superiors, colleagues, and social support in general predict lower levels of burnout.
3. In a Canadian study, job control was associated with burnout.
 - Resulted in lower exhaustion, cynicism & higher perceived accomplishment.

Systematic Review Findings

Well-being

Faculty burnout consistently found to be correlated with indicators of occupational well-being:

- job satisfaction,
- quitting intentions,
- job involvement,
- engagement,
- organizational commitment
- organizational citizenship behaviors
- stress,
- health problems,
- anxiety and psychological complaints.

Job satisfaction was negatively and consistently correlated with burnout, with medium to high correlations.

Overcoming Burnout

Individual Strategies

Individual Actions

- Be aware of your emotional and mental state,
- Carefully examine any physical or emotional changes that you or others observe,
- Think about where you can take a step back,
- Take advantage of institutional resources,
- Take time to truly disconnect, create work/life balance
- Identify professional and other social supports,

**What Will
You Do To
Address
Burnout?**

Think of the top five things you will do to reduce the likelihood of experiencing burnout.

Share – List your number 1 item in the chat.

What Can Your Organization Do To Address Burnout?

Think of the top five things your organization or institution might do address burnout.

Share – List your number 1 item in the chat.

Overcoming Burnout

Organizational Strategies

It Begins with Leadership

- Set an example
- Transparency –
- Clear communications –
- Clear expectations, reigning in excessive work demands -
- Employee recognition when it matters

Evidence- Based Actions

3 Overarching Principles

Allow faculty more control over how they do their jobs

- funding sought,
- research of interest,
- schedule, etc.

Reduce work demand

- Are there ways to eliminate low value work?
- Who really needs to attend the meeting?
- Is this a meeting or an email?

Foster positive social relationships in the workplace

E. L. Kelly, Sloan Distinguished Professor of Work & Organizational Studies, MIT Sloan School of Management

Evidence- Based Actions

Don't just educate, assess

- Awareness of burnout is important, but it is important for each organization to understand burnout in their setting.
- Cannot go to one size fits all solutions
- Fit the solutions to the causes
- Obtain employee input
- Are all of the resources that people need in place?

Evidence- Based Actions

Make time off truly time off

- Encourage away messages
- Discourage emails & questions to those on vacation and sabbatical

• Prioritize Wellness

Look for opportunities to experiment with work structure & environment?

References

Demerouti, Evangelia, Arnold B. Bakker, Friedhelm Nachreiner, and Wilmar B. Schaufeli. (2001). The Job Demands-Resources Model of Burnout. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 86 (3), 499–512.

Hutchins, Holly M., and Hilary Rainbolt. (2017). What triggers imposter phenomenon among academic faculty? A critical incident study exploring antecedents, coping, and development opportunities. *Human Resource Development International*, 20 (3), 194-214.

Jaremka, Lisa M., et al. (2020). Common academic experiences no one talks about: Repeated rejection, impostor syndrome, and burnout. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 15 (3), 519-543.

Maslach, Christina, Susan E. Jackson, and Michael P. Leiter. (1996) *Maslach Burnout Inventory Manual* (3rd ed.) Mountain View, CA: Consulting Psychologists Press.

Salimzadeh, R., Saroyan, A., & Hall, N. C. (2017). Examining the factors impacting academics' psychological well-being: A review of research. *International Education Research*, 5(1), 13-44. <http://dx.doi.org/10.12735/ier.v5n1p13>

- Zaynab Sabagh, Nathan C. Hall & Alenoush Saroyan (2018) Antecedents, correlates and consequences of faculty burnout, *Educational Research*, 60:2, 131-156, DOI: 10.1080/00131881.2018.1461573
- <https://nam.edu/valid-reliable-survey-instruments-measure-burnout-well-work-related-dimensions/>