
Burnout among female academic staff at universities in Khartoum State

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Burnout is referred to as the disease of modern life. The current study was undertaken to observe Burnout among female academic staff at universities in Khartoum State. **Materials and methods:** The sampling frame for the study comprised of 1523 full-time female academic staff working at both public and private universities at Khartoum State. Personal Information Form and Maslach Burnout inventory (MBI) were used for data collection. **Results:** Burnout is not high among married female academic staff, but it is high among the divorced and widow female academic staff affecting the depersonalization dimension. Absenteeism among female academic staff correlated positively with the burnout dimensions. Physiological and psychological health symptoms among female academic staff correlated positively with all the burnout dimensions. **Conclusion:** We recommend further detailed studies in this area for better understanding of burn out in the staff and to offer better stress management techniques.

Keywords: Burnout, female academic staff at universities.

Introduction

Burnout is referred to as the disease of modern life [1]. Burnout is an individual experience that is specific to the work context. And the outcomes that have been studied have been related to job performance and health outcomes. Burnout is a situation in which employees are emotionally exhausted, become detached from their clients and their work, and feel unable to accomplish their goals [2]. It is a response to self-induced psychological stress caused by illogical and irrational beliefs about work and job performance [3]. When job-related stress is prolonged, poor job performance moves into critical phase, known as burnout [4]. Burnout is not an imaginary condition, it's a mental and physiological condition caused by a stress overload, overtaxed emotionally, or physically exhausted. Burnout research had its roots in care-giving and service occupation, in which the core of the job was the relationship between provider and recipient; and that burnout was not studied as an individual response but as an individual's relational transactions in the workplace.

The professionals who are most vulnerable to burnout include; social workers, nurses, physicians, police officers, air traffic controllers, teachers, lawyers, managers and shop owners. Burnout affect people who constantly face stressor with little relief or those who must deal with other people as part of their jobs; those people who have a high frequency and a high intensity of interpersonal contact, which may lead to emotional exhaustion-a key component of job burnout. Thus, unrelieved stressful working conditions coupled with an individual's unrealistic expectations or ambitions may lead to physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion. In burnout, the individual can no longer cope with job demands, and the willingness to try even drops dramatically [5]. It was reported that the initial work on burnout developed out of the occupational sector of human services and education and of particular concern in these occupations were the emotional challenges of working intensively with people with either a care giving or teaching role, in which the core of the job was the relationship between provider and recipient. Once the three dimensions of burnout have been identified, several theories about the development of burnout have emerged such as the phase model.

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Burnout is a gradual and complex process that is not marked by sudden onset but rather by slow and gradual functioning. Burnout victims develop negative self-concept, they are unable to maintain the high standards they have set for themselves and they often cease to be concerned about others and experience physical as well as social problems [6]. It was claimed that candidates for job burnout seem to exhibit similar characteristics, they are idealistic and self-motivated achievers who often seek unattainable goals, and have few buffers against stress [4]. As a result, these people demand a great deal from themselves, and, because their goals are too high, they often fail to reach them, and, because they do not have the adequate buffers, stressors affect them rather directly. Vulnerability to burnout is influenced by other factors such as role conflict, role overload, and role ambiguity [2]. Organizations seek ways to avoid job burnout, these include, changing the part of the job that contribute to burnout such as the frequency or intensity of interpersonal contacts, in other cases, organizations can help employees learn how to cope better with their stressful work situations. As a result of experienced stress, burnout victims develops a variety of negative and often hostile attitudes towards the organization and themselves including fatalism, boredom, discontent, cynicism, and feeling of personal inadequacy. Thus, the person decreases his or her aspiration levels, loses confidence, and attempts to withdraw from the situation. Physical symptoms of burnout include low energy, chronic fatigue, and weakness; cognitive symptoms include negative attitudes toward clients, work, and self; emotional symptoms include feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, and entrapment; behavioral symptoms include absenteeism, changing jobs, and leaving the profession. Burnout is a distinct possibility for workaholics, - employees who are literally addicted to work and are internally driven to spend long hours at work-, because they place high expectation on themselves and others as a result, they experience difficulty achieving a desired work-life balance [2]. Several personality traits have been studied in an attempt to discover which type of people may be at greater risk for experiencing burnout. It have been shown that people with low levels of hardiness, have higher burnout scores, moreover, burnout is higher among people who have an external locus of control rather than an internal locus of control. Similarly, results on burned-out coping styles with stressful events revealed that burned out people cope in a rather passive and defensive way. Psychologist Susanne Kobasa has identified psychological hardiness [7]. Hardiness is a personality characteristic associated with

a lower rate of stress-related illness [8]. People **who** show a strong sense of commitment, control and challenge are labeled as hardy personalities. The current study was undertaken to observe Burnout among female academic staff at universities in Khartoum State

Materials and methods.

Participants

The sampling frame for the study comprised 1523 full-time female academic staff working at both public and private universities at Khartoum State. The sources of the data supplied differed from one university to another. Some universities submitted their annual book, or data in the form of up-dated sheets. Others advised to use the university updated website. The data for each university was sorted concentrating only on female academic staff. For the purpose of the study, the female academic staffs were classified according to where they work, i.e. in governmental or non-governmental universities. Further classifications were done of both the governmental and non-governmental universities into theoretical and applied colleges to ensure the accuracy of counting female academic staff. From the data supplied, all the faculties of the theoretical colleges of each governmental and non-governmental university were grouped and the numbers of females counted. The same was done with the applied colleges of the governmental and the non-governmental universities. The sampling frame was stratified into enumeration units based on the formula used according to theoretical and applied colleges within both the governmental and the non-governmental universities. A pilot study was conducted and then the researcher selected the participants according to the final number stated for each faculty and with the help and permission of the Dean of the faculty and staff members, the questionnaires were administered to the (306) anonymous female academic staff over a period of two and half month. Female academic staffs were notified of the study and its potential benefits to them.

Tools:

Personal Information Form:

The researcher designed the personal information form that contained the basic information about the respondents' such as age, marital status, job academic title and years of work experience.

Maslach Burnout inventory (MBI)

Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) follows Likert Scale; which is based on an item analysis method called the summated ratings method-a type of numerical attitude scale- in which numbers are associated with different responses (e.g., strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree, and strongly disagree

Statistical analysis: The study processed in two stages which used the Statistical Package for Social Sciences

(SPSS): Stage (1): the researcher applied the following statistical tests to analyze the data of the pilot study: Pearson's Coefficient of correlation and Cronbach's Alpha. Stage (2): the researcher applied the following statistical tests to analyze the data of the study sample: Frequencies and Percentages, Pearson's Coefficient of correlation, One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), Post-hoc test (Tukey Test) which shows the difference between groups, T-test.

Results

Table no 1: frequencies and percentages of the basic information of the sample

Variables	Levels of variables	Frequency	Percentage
Age	23-30	52	17
	31-40	166	54.25
	41-50	64	20.91
	50 and above	24	7.84
Total number of female		306	100
Marital status	Married	197	64.4
	Widow	4	1.3
	Divorced	20	6.5
	Unmarried	85	27.8
Total number of female		306	100
Degree of academic status	Professor	3	1
	Associate professor	22	7.2
	Assistant professor	92	30
	Lecturer	189	61.8
Total number of female		306	100
Number of children	0	135	44.1
	1-2	83	27.1
	3-4	65	21.2
	5-6	20	6.6
	7-8	3	1
Total number of female		306	100
Years of working experience	1-6	105	34.3
	7-10	101	33
	11 and above	100	32.7
Total number of female		306	100

Table 1: shows that female academic staffs' ages range from 23 to 50 years and above, most of them 54.25% their ages fall between the ranges of 31 to 40 years. In addition, most of the female academic staffs in this study are married 64.4%; the unmarried comprise 27.8% of the sample and the remaining 7.8% are either divorced or widows.

As for the academic title reflecting the educational level, the data shows that the majority 61.8% are lectures, 30% are assistant professor, 7.2% are associate professor, and 1% are awarded professorship. Nearly half of the female academic staffs in this study do not have children 44.1%. Those who have from one to two children are 27.1%, while those who have from

3 to 4 children their percentage is 21.2%, the rest who have from 5 to 8 children are 7.6%. In addition, the data of the sample reveals that the majority 67.3% of the female academic staffs are working in these universities for the last 10 years while the remaining 32.7% females are in the teaching profession for 11 years and above.

Table 2: Correlation between burnout with age, years of work experience and levels of education among female academic staff at universities in Khartoum state

Burnout Dimensions	Correlation with age	Correlation with work experience	Correlation with educational level
Emotional Exhaustion	-0.0340	0.044	0.0750
Depersonalization	-0.186**	-0.0910	0.112*
Low accomplishment	0.107*	0.119*	-0.048
Total Burn-out	0.0640	0.0640	0.058

*indicates that the value of correlation is significant at 0.05

**indicates that the value of correlation is significant at 0.01

Burnout is high among married female academic staff at universities in Khartoum state”.

To investigate this hypothesis the researcher applied one-way analysis of variance.

Table 3: Difference between averages of marital status in dimensions of burnout among female academic staff at universities in Khartoum state

Dimensions	Source	Sum of square	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig	Conclusion
Emotional exhaustion	Between groups	150.7	2	75.36	2.80	0.06	There is no significant difference
	Within groups	8145.2	303	26.88			
	Total	8296.0	306				
Depersonalization	Between groups	40.4	2	20.2	4.21	0.01	There is a significant difference
	Within groups	1453.2	303	4.7			
	Total	1493.6	306				
Low Accomplishment	Between groups	30.11	2	15.0	2.38	0.09	There is no significant difference
	Within groups	1915.0	303	6.32			
	Total	1945.1	306				
Burn-out	Between groups	192.9	2	96.4	1.61	0.20	There is no significant difference
	Within groups	18052.6	303	59.5			
	Total	18245.6	306				

As can be shown from table (3), there is a significant statistical difference in the depersonalization dimension between groups, in order to locate this difference the researcher applied the post-hoc test (Tukey Test) which showed that the difference is between the divorce female academic staff (mean =4.71) and the widow female academic staff (mean= 5.88), whereas, no other difference is found between the other groups.

The finding of this hypothesis clearly shows that there is no significant difference between and within groups in regard to the emotional exhaustion and personal accomplishment dimensions. However, there is a

significant statistical difference between groups in the depersonalization dimension among the divorce and widow female academic staff.

Table 4: Correlation between occupational stress and burnout among female academic staff at universities in Khartoum state

Burnout dimensions	Correlation with occupational stress	Significant	Conclusion
Emotional Exhaustion	0.368	0.001	There is a positive statistical correlation
Depersonalization	0.226	0.001	There is a positive statistical correlation
Low accomplishment	0.203	0.001	There is a positive statistical correlation
Total Burn-out	0.417	0.001	There is a positive statistical correlation

The result of hypothesis (4) shows that there is a positive statistical correlation between occupational stress and all burnout dimensions. The finding of this

hypothesis suggests that when occupational stress among female academic staff increases, burnout increases.

Table 5: shows the correlation between burnout dimensions and absenteeism among female academic staff at universities in Khartoum state

Burn out Dimensions	Correlation with absenteeism	Significant	Conclusion
Emotional Exhaustion	0.246	0.001	There is a positive statistical correlation
Depersonalization	0.215	0.001	There is a positive statistical correlation
Low accomplishment	0.03	0.304	There is no statistical correlation
Total Burn-out	0.245	0.001	There is a positive statistical correlation

The finding of this hypothesis shows that there is a positive statistical correlation between absenteeism and the dimensions of emotional exhaustion and

depersonalization, whereas no statistical correlation is found between absenteeism and low accomplishment dimension.

Table 6: Correlation between burnout and health symptoms (psychological and physiological) among female academic staff at universities in Khartoum state

Burnout Dimensions	Physiological Symptoms	Psychological Symptoms	Total of Symptoms
Emotional Exhaustion	0.367**	0.560**	0.528**
Depersonalization	0.162**	0.292**	0.262**
Low accomplishment	0.132*	0.147**	0.150**
Total Burn-out	0.360**	0.548**	0.517**

* indicates that the value is significant at 0.05

** indicates that the value is significant at 0.01

The findings of this hypothesis shows that there is a statistical significant positive correlation between the physiological symptoms and the emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and the low personal accomplishment dimensions; as well as a statistical significant positive correlation between the psychological symptoms and the emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and low personal accomplishment dimensions.

Discussion

The most well studied measurement of the burnout in the literature is the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI). Maslach and her colleague Jackson in 1981 developed the measure that weighs the effects of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced sense of personal accomplishment. The indicator has become the standard tool for measuring burnout in research on the syndrome. People who experience all three symptoms have the greatest degrees of burnout, although emotional exhaustion is said to be the whole mark of burnout. Maslach, et.al (2001), indicated that the only measure that assesses all three of the core dimensions is the MBI. The MBI-Human Services Survey (MBI-HSS) was designed for use with people working in the human services and health care. The second version (the MBI-Educators Survey, or MBI-ES), was developed for use by people working in the educational settings. A third general version (The MBI-General Survey, MBI-GS), was developed for burnout within occupations that are not so clearly people-oriented. Evidence suggest that women, on average, are somewhat more likely to face burnout than are men, for example, surveys indicated that 11 percent more women than men report that high stress has affected their health. Additionally, a Northwestern Life Insurance study cited in Hellriegel, et.al [9] found that job burnout rate was 36 percent for women versus 28 percent for men; women comprise much of what is now known as "the new collar group" of employees, - are those who work primarily with computers and telephones-, about 70 percent of telemarketers are women. Of all the demographic variables that have been studied, age is the one that have been mostly related to burnout, while the demographic variable of sex has not been a strong predictor of burnout; moreover, some studies have found out that those with a higher level of education report higher levels of burnout than less educated employee.

When female academic staff become burned-out, they are more likely to complain, to attribute their errors to

others, to magnify their dominant rates and to be highly irritable. Burnout leads to increased absenteeism and higher turnover, and decreased quality and quantity of job performance. Organizations and/or institutions need to identify both the jobs that lead to early burnouts and those female academic staff who are beginning to exhibit one or more of the burnout symptoms. According to Nevid [10] warning signs of burnout that develop slowly over time include, mental and physical loss of energy; increased irritability and prone to anger; development of stress-related problems such as headaches, backaches, general malaise, or depression, problems with concentration at work; changes in one's feelings toward work in someone who was previously highly committed and enthusiastic, as evidence by feelings of detachment, loss of motivation, or lack of concern about the quality of one's work; loss of satisfaction or of a sense of accomplishment in performing work; feeling that one lacks the energy or will to remain committed to one's work.

Most people in high-burnout professions have evolved their way of coping with the burnout; some use strategies such as, withdrawal from people, cutting down on working hours, taking frequent breaks from work, and others by changing the scene entirely by going away on vacations. Still, many people in high-stress helping occupations rely on "decompression" routines at the end of the working day; that is, they jog, listen to music, curl up with a novel, stretch out in a hot bath, or meditate [11]. The relationship between stress and stress consequences is not necessarily direct, similarly, neither is the relationship between work stressors and stress. Both relationships may be influenced by stress moderators, - something that mediates or affects the nature of a relationship-, which is important in understanding stress [12]. Our study results are in accordance with earlier studies.

Conclusion

Burnout is not high among married female academic staff, but it is high among the divorced and widow female academic staff affecting the depersonalization dimension. Absenteeism among female academic staff correlated positively with the burnout dimensions. Physiological and psychological health symptoms among female academic staff correlated positively with all the burnout dimensions. We recommend further detailed studies in this area for better understanding of burn out in the staff and to offer better stress management techniques.

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