Faculty burnout: Does anyone think of that?

**Background:** Job burnout is one of the factors that decrease the productivity of university faculty members. This is important for teachers who are essential elements of the educational system. Having failure in paying attention to environmental and organizational factors as well as psychological and personality traits in professors will lead to adverse effects on their mental health, increasing job burnout and consequently, declining the quality of human capital education.

**Methods:** This study is a narrative review aiming to investigate the texts that faculty members have more likely experienced burnout in the dimension of emotional exhaustion and then in depersonalization. Factors affecting job burnout included environmental, organizational (such as workplace, social support), and individual (such as extraversion and idealism) characteristics. The study aimed to state the relationship with burnout and reliable burnout strategies, burnout can be prevented.

**Conclusion:** By combining the individual and organizational characteristics with work areas, sustainable workloads, supportive management and work environment, the quality of teaching will improve.

**Keywords:** Faculty members, Job burnout, Academic burnout, Resilience.
INTRODUCTION

Education fosters talents and creativity, increases people’s production capacity in the community, and leads to more income as well as increased capacity for future utility. Education is a foundation for change and development, and as the knowledge and skills of the workforce increase, as a result of investing in education, the facilities and capacities needed to achieve a modern and developed society will be facilitated (1). Because of its special cultural, social, and political role, universities have always been important sources of all developments and responsive to the current and future needs of society, including the production and dissemination of knowledge, the training of specialized human forces with reasonable social behaviors, and the provision of specialized services. If a country wants to get in the way of development, universities will be the starting point for that path (2).

Although educational conditions and facilities are one of the factors influencing the process of teaching and learning, there is no doubt that human resources and especially university professors are as the most important elements of the educational system for success in achieving educational goals by controlling different variables and providing better learning conditions, while enabling some changes in learners. Professors play the greatest role in improving the quality of higher education and the training of specialist human resources that build a successful and developed community or a backward and unsuccessful society (3, 4). The competences and abilities of the faculty members can help learners to grow physically, mentally, emotionally, socially, and spiritually (5).

Faculty members are the largest resources of universities and form the main body of any university. Professors, as one of the pillars of student education and training, have effective role in promoting community health since they can influence thousands of people with their ideas. Preservation and scientific promotion of faculty members is one of the most important factors in evaluating specific performance indices of each university and its realization produces better results in the outputs of this system. Attention to high level documents, including the country’s comprehensive scientific plan, makes the preservation and promotion of university faculty members even more important (6).

In their study, Hakanen et al. (2006) concluded that job demands (including student incivility, high workloads, and poor physical work environment) were positively associated with job burnout and ill-health, while job resources (including job control, access to information, supervisory support, social climate, and creativity in universities) were positively associated with employment and organizational commitment and negatively related to job burnout. In addition, symptoms of burnout had a negative relationship with organizational commitment and a positive relationship with ill health. On the other hand, their findings showed that lack of important job resources to meet job demand may be associated with burnout, which may further undermine performance and lead to less organizational commitment.

The importance of losing more resources reflects the fact that poor job resources are directly associated with burnout and indirectly related to lower levels of work engagement. Job resources increase the motivation, commitment, and persistence of teachers in the teaching profession, while it also reduces the incidence of job burnout (7). Given the importance of the role of professors mentioned above, it seems that disregarding the psychological and personality traits of professors may lead to undesirable effects on their mental health, increased job burnout, and consequently a decline in the quality of human capital education. Therefore, understanding of burnout and its causes helps faculty members and educational managers to prevent this problem and its consequences.

METHODS

This study is a narrative review performed in November, 2018 and aimed to investigate the factors affecting job burnout of faculty members. The results of the present study are based on articles published in national and international journals. Articles were searched using Persian and Latin keywords including job burnout, resilience, self-care, faculty members, and academic burnout, individually or in combination at SID, ERIC, Noormags, Magiran, Google Scholar, Science Direct, PubMed databases regardless of time limit. Inclusion criteria for the study consisted of keywords in the title and abstract of articles and exclusion criteria were research content unrelated to the purpose of this study, articles that included faculty members but had not included job burnout, and articles that had investigated job burnout in other professions. In the initial search, a total of 545 studies were found from which 112 abstracts were studied after a review of the titles. Then, 96 articles were thoroughly studied and finally 32 studies that had the highest correlation with job burnout among faculty members were carefully reviewed (Figure 1).

RESULTS

Examination of the literature showed that faculty members are more likely to experience burnout in the emotional exhaustion dimension (8–10) and then in the depersonalization dimension (8, 9). Arefi et al. (2010) (11) studied 156 faculty members at Shahid Beheshti University and indicated that about half of the faculty members felt they faced individual inadequacy in their jobs.

Symptoms of burnout which have been emphasized in different studies included: physical exhaustion, emotional exhaustion, sleep problems, physical symptoms, helplessness, moodiness, anxiety, depression, guilt, alcohol and drug abuse, lack of confidence, withdrawal from coworkers, concentration reduction, and pessimism (12-15). According to a study by Korczak et al. (2010) (16), professors have negative attitudes toward their job and find it boring. Exhaustion in the physical dimension is characterized by pain or problems in the stomach and intestine, while experiencing problems in the emotional dimension makes them feel that all their energy is wasted totally and they do not have the necessary and sufficient power. They may develop a
pessimistic attitude toward their workplace and colleagues and withdraw from others, lose their concentration, attention, and creativity.

Environmental and organizational factors:
Studies show that there is a significant relationship between job characteristics including workplace (17), physical conditions of teaching, (18) income (17, 19, and 20), and burnout. Job demands (such as workload, job characteristics, and value conflict) also influence job burnout (20). Olivares-Fuández et al (2014) (21) stated that job conflict and job ambiguity are positively related to job burnout. People who have no problems with managers and co-workers have less emotional exhaustion as well as less job burnout (18). There is also a significant relationship between curriculum features and student characteristics with job burnout. Teachers who are satisfied with the curriculum show less job burnout (18). Another factor affecting burnout is lack of social support (20, 22).

Studies examining the relationship between work experience and burnout have primarily reported that people with less work experience will suffer more job burnout (23, 24) due to higher levels of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization compared to those with more work experience (23). A study by Koruklu et al. (2012) (18) showed that teachers with more work experience were more likely to suffer job burnout. Studies have shown that stress is one of the risk factors for burnout (19, 20, 22, 25-27). Factors affecting the stress include change in health care financing, health centers merging, and ownership. This leads to changes in physicians' traditional roles, as well as shifting academic education, which will in turn make faculty members involved in contextual competitions in their basic or clinical research.

Other factors affecting the stress include innovations and changes in teaching methods, the increasing number of learners, increasing attention to learners' competence, and increasing expectations for the development of interprofessional learning opportunities (19). Students' destructive behaviors also lead to increased stress and burnout of medical educators (27). Out-of-work stressors (e.g. stressors in the family and lack of support) will also lead to more job burnout (20).

According to Skovholt (2011) (12) the most important risk factors for burnout are:
1. Excessive workload
2. Lack of control on job conditions
3. Insufficient rewards
4. Disintegration of business community
5. Lack of justice
6. Conflict of values
7. Individual – profession incompatibility

Individual factors:
Studies show that there is a significant relationship between personality traits and job burnout (20, 28, and 29). Neuroticism, extraversion, and conscience are associated with all three dimensions of burnout (28). From the personality point of view, those with less endurance, lower self-esteem, and an external control area (meaning that they attribute achievements and successes to external factors rather than their activities and efforts) are at risk of burnout more than other people. Similarly, individuals with high expectations and idealistic occupational attitudes are at greater risk of burnout (29). Motivation and optimism are also associated with burnout (20). In a study by Abdulghafour et al. (2011) (17), the results showed a significant relationship between nationality and job burnout. A number of studies have reported that there is a significant negative relationship between burnout and resilience; however, with decreasing levels of resilience job burnout decreases as well (30, 31).

The majority of studies have reported that burnout is higher in men than in women (17, 18, 24), and this difference is most affected by emotional exhaustion (17) and decreased individual performance (18). A number of researchers also found that burnout was higher in women than in men (10, 23), with differences associated with the dimensions of emotional exhaustion (10, 23) and depersonalization (23). A small number of studies also found that gender had no significant effect on job burnout (11).

There was no dominant result for the age of people with burnout. The number of studies reporting that burnout was higher among younger people (18, 24) was similar to the number of studies reporting that there was no significant relationship between age and job burnout (11, 23). However, a few studies have concluded that the risk of burnout increases with age (9).

The majority of studies confirmed the finding that single individuals are more likely to experience burnout (11, 17, 29), which is due to the higher scores of single individuals in the dimension of emotional analysis (11) and their lower scores in the dimension of reduced individual performance...
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Being single, especially in men, increases job burnout (29). One study also found that there was no significant relationship between marital status and burnout dimensions (23).

Studies show that there is a significant correlation between job burnout and depression (16, 20). The relationship between job burnout and other illnesses is still unclear (16). The results of the study by Rostami, Abedi, and Shafeli (2012) (32) showed that interest was inversely related to burnout, and the results were the same for both men and women. Some research has indicated that there is a significant relationship between the academic level (29) and the type of education (9) with job burnout, as people with higher academic level are more at the risk of job burnout (29).

The summary of individual and organizational factors affecting faculty members’ burnout is shown in Figure 2.

Outcomes

Researchers mention that job burnout among faculty members causes them to feel inefficient and dissatisfied with their duties while not committing to perform their duties (20, 33). Job burnout will reduce work activities and time dedicated to teaching (20, 26), as well as the quality of education would decrease (20, 26, 33, 34) along with increased intention to leave university (33, 9) among faculty members.

Strategies to prevent academic burnout

Resilience is one of the factors contributing to the achievement of a healthy personality and the flourishing of human potential (35). Professional resilience is a dynamic process that enables individuals to cope with stressful working conditions. It also enhances their skills and performance and allows them to overcome their concerns and uncertainty about their confidence and their professional knowledge as well as their skills (36). Evidence suggests that resilience is not an enduring feature but it can be developed through targeted interventions. It is therefore necessary to gain insight into the attributes supporting it and the strategies that can be used to promote it by using a robust evidence-based approach (37). Self-care is one of these strategies that can be very important in avoiding burnout. Self-care is defined as a set of purposeful behavioral strategies that promote individual well-being, while reducing stress and overcoming challenges that enable the employees to communicate effectively with their client (36).

Self-care consists of five general areas as follows (Table 1):

**DISCUSSION**

Job burnout is important from two points of view: first it affects individuals’ mental health and causes physical as well as psychological symptoms, leaving work, changing job, and inner dissatisfaction; and secondly, it reduces the quality of service provided to society and brings about dissatisfaction with services (40). Problems caused by burnout are even more important in those who engage in educational and research activities related to human education and the production of science. Therefore, recognizing and preventing job burnout among university professors due to the sensitivity of the organization’s mission can be effective in enhancing the professors’ mental health and improving the quality of learning and teaching processes along with the development of specialist human resources (41).

Two factors that help prevent faculty members’ burnout include background as well as individual factors. Background factors are related to satisfaction with basic psychological needs in the workplace (such as degree of independence, sense of competence and independence), while individual

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Figure 2. Individual and organizational factors influencing faculty members’ burnout
factors include satisfaction with basic needs, motivation and self-efficacy (19). Environmental and organizational factors are more effective than individual factors in preventing faculty members' job burnout (8, 29). By combining individual and organizational characteristics with work areas, sustainable workload, sense of choice and control, recognition and reward, supportive work society, fairness, and meaningful as well as valuable work, burnout can be prevented (29).

Another factor that helps to achieve a healthy personality and flourish human capabilities is resilience. Resilience, as one of the individual capacities, has an effective role in preventing and reducing mental disorders and enhancing mental health (35). An important consequence of resilience is effective coping, mastery, and adaptation (42), which in turn improves individuals' performance and inner satisfaction along with satisfying others who interact with the individual (35).

Since the issue of burnout among faculty members is one of the most important topics about which numerous studies have been performed, it may have included more research from other existing databases, but the reviews among available resources revealed that all of them have cited similar points and factors that are also mentioned in this paper.

Considering the importance of the role of professors, it seems that ignoring environmental and organizational factors as well as psychological and personality traits in professors leads to adverse effects on their mental health, increasing job burnout and consequently, diminishing quality of human capital education. Therefore, understanding of burnout, its causes and ways to prevent it, helps professors and educational managers to prevent this problem and its outcomes. The results of this study can be used to manage burnout in faculty members and managers.

**Ethical considerations**

Ethical issues (Including plagiarism, informed consent, misconduct, data fabrication and/or falsification, double publication and/or submission, redundancy, etc.) have been completely observed by the authors.

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