

Burnout in Turkish Public Sector

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Abstract

The basis of different cognitive levels of human beings, demographic characteristics might cause them to feel burnout at different levels depending on their profession. It is crucial especially for human resources planning in public institutions to have a clear idea about which demographic characteristics trigger burnout level. The purpose of this study is to reveal the effect of the demographic characteristics of Turkish public officers on their burnout level. For that purpose, 403 employees, randomly selected among those in public institutions, were exposed to the Maslach Burnout Inventory. The study concluded that demographic characteristics have an influence on burnout level. It was discovered that burnout levels get increased with increased tenure of office and age.

Keywords: Burnout, Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalization, Sense of Personal Accomplishment, Public Sector

Introduction

In our modern business world, technological advances have led to a notable decrease in the quality of production and productivity. Relinquishing some of their functions to machines with the Industrial Revolution in the 19th century, human beings cannot rescue themselves from the whirlpool. This makes it inevitable for them to constantly experience problems in the business world. In recent years, new business environments, managements, qualifications of the jobs and autonomy have caused them to develop a new feeling, namely “Burnout Syndrome”.

These early studies on Burnout Syndrome were conducted from two perspectives. Clinical perspective dealt with the symptoms of burnout and its effects on mental health whereas the social one was concerned with the relation between those who served and those who was served (Maslach et al., 2001:399). Such studies were based primarily on the experiences of customer services, health staff and those people who, by the nature of their profession, served and helped others (Cordes and Dougeherty,1993:622).

The 1980s brought about a relatively more experimental dimension to the studies. The studies of the time used survey forms and research methods, and covered wider samples. The focus was on measuring burnout, which resulted in the development of new scales and research methods. The most commonly used scale was the Maslach Burnout Inventory designed by Maslach and Jackson.

In the 1990s, studies were not confined to customer services or health-related professions but started to encompass professions not included in service sector. Statistical instruments were introduced and significant results were obtained (Dormann and Zapf, 2004:61). The use of structural models was triggered by organizational factors and the complicated relation among the three dimensions of burnout. Such models enabled researchers to explain the causality of burnout and to distinguish between actual underlying causes and insignificant causes of burnout (Maslach et al., 2001:401). Based on the findings

of previous studies and on the assumption that burnout was a result of the interaction between the working environment and individual, researchers started investigating the relevance of the feeling to, firstly, business environment and, secondly, to individual opinions and emotions (Surgevil, 2006:16). The increasing number of studies caused the issue to cross the U.S. boundaries. Studies were translated into different languages and spread quickly to a number of countries throughout Europe. Burnout Syndrome has now turned into a global issue with studies conducted in different parts of the world (Maslach, 2003:169).

Burnout

Studies about burnout were started by clinical psychologist Freudenberger (1974, 1975) and social psychologist Maslach(1976). Freudenberger(1974) defined the term burnout as “the state of exhaustion as a result of failure, fatigue, loss of energy or power and unsatisfied desires on one’s internal resources”(Freudenberger 1974:159). In other words, burnout is defined as emotional exhaustion following excessive working that causes one to fail to meet the requirements of his/her job (Kirilmaz et al., 2003).

One of the most commonly accepted theories of burnout is the three-dimensional burnout model by Maslach and Jackson. They argued that burnout had three dimensions, namely emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and sense of personal accomplishment (Maslach and Jackson 1981:102).

Emotional Exhaustion

According to Maslach, emotional exhaustion is the most important dimension of all. Emotional exhaustion is lack of energy one feels as a result of the excessive amount of psychological and emotional demands while he/she is helping others and a state in which he/she gets the feeling that his/her resources have been used up (Ozyurt et al., 2004:22). Maslach and Jackson(1981) defined it as a state in which employees increasingly feel tired and emotionally worn-out. Emotional exhaustion is the beginning and centre of burnout syndrome. In a working environment marked by intense emotions, one forces himself/herself and is overwhelmed by the demands of others. Furthermore, he/she attempts to work harder and do his/her best since he/she has high expectations. Emotional exhaustion starts to occur when individuals are not rewarded for their efforts (Maslach and Jackson, 1981). Therefore, they fail to concentrate emotionally on what they do. When they get up in the morning, individuals feel as weary as the exact moment they went to bed the previous night, they get the feeling that they do not have enough energy to start a new day and go to work, their emotional resources have been thoroughly used up and they fail to find a way to get refreshed (Dursun, 2000:15).

Depersonalization

Depersonalization is another dimension defined by Maslach. The dimension is considered the lowest and the most problematic of all. Depersonalization is defined as “adopting a strict, cold, indifferent and even inhumane attitude towards those who is served”. This is caused by a considerable decrease in expectations of profession, increasing feeling of getting distanced and regarding customers as objects. This dimension is concerned with interpersonal relations and includes negative changes in the attitudes especially towards those who are served (Hock, 1988:168). In fact, tending to get distanced from customers and depersonalization are a reaction to emotional exhaustion. In a way, the person develops a self-protection strategy. He/she constantly chooses to escape from things in order to relieve his/her emotional load. He/she minimizes his/her relations with others to the level only sufficient to perform his/her tasks. At this stage, the person in question gets alienated from meaningful

relations with others. Seeing that it is not easy to be in close relationship with others and to remain at bay at the same time, he/she adopts a cold and indifferent attitude towards the feelings and emotions of others (Isikhan, 2004). However, such attitudes might have a notably negative influence on one's working life.

Sense of Personal Accomplishment

Personal accomplishment is the final dimension. It deals with one's feelings of satisfaction and accomplishment. Personal failure, on the other hand, is a state in which one considers himself/herself incompetent and unsuccessful. Negative attitudes towards others make one develop corresponding negative attitudes to himself/herself. Emotional exhaustion and depersonalization causes one to be unsuccessful in his/her working life and to get the feeling that he/she is incompetent. As a result, he/she feels guilty, believes that nobody loves him/her and regards himself/herself unsuccessful. It is at this exact point that low personal accomplishment, the third dimension of burnout, presents itself (Ormen, 1993:3).

The Purpose and The Model of The Research

The purpose of this study is to determine the burnout levels of public employees and to find out whether their burnout levels differ depending on demographic characteristics.

The model of research is showed Figure 1 below

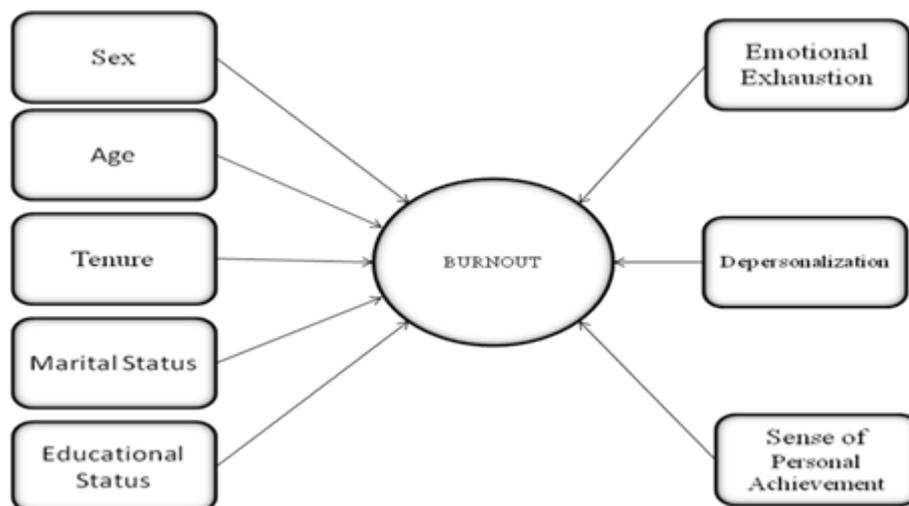


Figure 1. The Model of Research

The Method of The Research

Participants

Within the scope of the study, the survey form was submitted to 850 employees from the District Offices of İller Bankası in Eskişehir and Bursa. However, 403 of them were returned. The percentage of return is 47.4. The sample profile was demonstrated in Table 1.

Table 1. The Values for Demographic Variables of The Participants

		Frequency	Percentage(%)			Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Men	343	85,1	Tenure	Less than 1 Year	26	6
	Women	60	14,9		1-4 Years	42	10
Age	19-25	8	2		5-8 Years	45	11
	26-35	69	17,1		9-12 Years	32	8
	36-45	89	22,1		13-15 Years	5	2
	46-55	199	49,4		15 years and more	253	63
	55 +	38	9,4	Education Status	High School	154	38
Marital Status	Married	348	86		Vocational School	54	13
	Unmarried	50	12		Univesity	140	35
	Divorced	5	2		Master and PhD	55	14
TOTAL		403	100	TOTAL	403	100	

Data Collection Tool

This empirical work was performed based on a questionnaire form. The questionnaire form consists of two sections. The first one is comprised of questions as to the employees' demographic characteristics, gender, age, length of service, educational status and marital status whereas the second section employs the Maslach Burnout Inventory, whose validity and reliability studies were conducted by Maslach herself. The Maslach Burnout Inventory consists of 22 statements in the 5-point likert-type scale. Each statement in the scale is accompanied by five optional answers: Never (1), Scarcely (2), Sometimes (3), Often (4), Always (5). The Maslach Burnout inventory has 3 dimensions, namely emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and personal accomplishment. The dimensions emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and personal accomplishment consist of 9, 5 and 8 items respectively.

Data Analysis Method

The data were analyzed through SPSS v.16 software. The analyses included descriptive statistical techniques, reliability analysis, independent t test, one-way and two-way variance analysis techniques.

Findings and Discussion

The findings related to the demographic variables are presented in the Table 1. Alpha coefficient was used in order to test the reliability of the 3-dimension results for participants. Alpha (Cronbach) coefficient was calculated for all dimensions. With values greater than 0.7 (Hair et al., 1998), the results are found to be reliable. The reliability of general questionnaires are computed as 0.76.

Exploratory Factor Analysis

Exploratory factor analysis was conducted on the data matrix composed of 22 variables in total in the questionnaire form. The factors obtained at the end of the exploratory factor analysis are discrete because they measure different dimensions. When a factor is referred, it means dimension rooted in various variables. Within this framework, 22 variables were analyzed and nine variables totally independent from each other were obtained at the end of the practices. While total variable quantity obtained at the results of factor analyses conducted was 22, variables with high correlations among each others were analyzed after removing variables with factor loadings below 0.50. In literature, the total explained variance ratio with 0.50 and higher is accepted as good for validation (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988; Henson & Roberts, 2006; Varki & Colgate, 2001). The number of removed variables is 9 and the total number of evaluated variables is 13.

Table 2. The Results of Exploratory Factor Analysis

Factor Name and Ranking	Factor Components		
	1	2	3
Emotional Exhaustion	849		
Emotional Exhaustion	813		
Emotional Exhaustion	809		
Emotional Exhaustion	807		
Emotional Exhaustion	610		
Depersonalization		701	
Depersonalization		691	
Depersonalization		651	
Depersonalization		642	
Depersonalization		591	
Sense of Personal Accomplishment			754
Sense of Personal Accomplishment			657
Sense of Personal Accomplishment			654

Relationship Between The Level of Burnout and Demographic Characteristics

The t-test was conducted to determine relationship between gender and the level of burnout of participants.

Table 3. The Results of T-Test Between gender and the level of burnout of participants

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Burnout	Equal variances assumed	2,997	,084	1,018	401	,309
	Equal variances not assumed			1,148	90,677	,254

As can be seen from Table 3, the T-Test, statistically significant at 5%, showed that gender and burnout levels are not significantly correlated.

One way Anova test was conducted to determine relationship between tenure and the level of burnout of participants. Results are given in the Table 4 and Table 5

Table 4. One way ANOVA test descriptives results between participants' tenure and level of the burnout

Descriptives				
Tenure	N	Mean	Std.Deviation	Std.Error
Less than 1 year	26	1.6026	.70565	.13839
1-4 years	42	1.8651	.96007	.14814
5-8 years	45	1.9852	1.13029	.16849
9-12 years	32	2.0833	.56796	.10040
13-15 years	5	2.5333	.69121	.30912
15 yeas and more	253	2.1647	.86761	.05455
TOTAL	403	2.0753	.89103	.04439

Table 5. One way ANOVA test results between participants' tenure and level of the burnout ANOVA

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Burnout	Between Groups	11.105	5	2.221	2.862	.015
	Within Groups	308.057	397	.776		
	Total	319.161	402			

The One-way ANOVA Test, statistically significant at 5%, revealed that tenure and burnout levels are significantly correlated. Those who have 13 to 15 years of length of service suffer from higher burnout levels than others (Table 4).

To determine relationship between educational status and the level of burnout of participants, one way Anova test was conducted. The results revealed that educational status and burnout levels are not significantly correlated at statistically 5% significant level. The result is shown Table 6 below

Table 6. One way ANOVA results between participants education status and the level of burnout ANOVA

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Burnout	Between Groups	.555	3	.185	.232	.874
	Within Groups	318.606	399	.799		
	Total	319.161	402			

To determine relationship between age and the level of burnout of participants, one way Anova test was conducted.

Table 7. One way ANOVA test descriptives results between participants age and level of the burnout

Participants Age	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
19-25	8	1.5000	.43644	.15430
26-35	69	1.7101	.84194	.10136
36-45	89	2.0899	.86422	.09161
46-55	199	2.2144	.86576	.06137
55 and More	38	2.0965	1.03659	.16816
TOT AL	403	2.0753	.89103	.04439

Table 8. One way ANOVA test results between participants age and level of the burnout ANOVA

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Burnout	Between Groups	15.735	4	3.934	5.160	.000
	Within Groups	303.426	398	.762		
	Total	319.161	402			

The One-way ANOVA Test, statistically significant at 5%, revealed that age and burnout levels are significantly correlated. Employees who are 46 – 55 years old suffer from higher burnout levels than others. When the Table 7 is examined, it can be seen that burnout levels get higher as the age increases.

Table 9. The two way ANOVA test descriptive results among participants age, marital status and the level of burnout

AGE	MARITAL STATUS	MEAN	Std. deviation	N	AGE	MARITAL STATUS	MEAN	Std. deviation	N
19-25	Married	1.6667	.	1	26-35	Married	1.6667	.79077	44
	Single	1.4762	.46576	7		Single	1.7500	.93896	24
	TOTAL	1.5000	.43644	8		Divorced	2.6667	.	1
36-45	Married	2.0123	.83076	81	46-55	TOTAL	1.7101	.84194	69
	Single	2.8750	.85333	8		Married	2.2419	.87234	186
	Divorced					Single	1.8333	.61721	8
55 -55+	TOTAL	2.0899	.86422	89	Divorced	1.8000	.83666	5	
	Married	2.0278	1.02159	36	TOTAL	2.2144	.86576	199	
	Single	3.3333	.00000	2	TOTAL	Married	2.0920	.88600	348
	Divorced					Single	1.9728	.94241	49
TOTAL	2.0965	1.03659	38	Divorced		1.9444	.82776	6	
				TOTAL		2.0753	.89103	403	

Table 10. The two way ANOVA test descriptive results among participants age, marital status and the level of burnout

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	27.612 ^a	11	2.510	3.366	.000
Intercept	124.700	1	124.700	1067.236	.000
Age	10.903	4	2.726	3.656	.006
Marital Status	1.849	2	.924	1.240	.291
Age*Marital Status	10.439	5	2.088	2.800	.017
Error	291.549	391	.746		
Total	2054.778	403			
Corrected Total	319.161	402			

Note: a R Squared = .087 (Adjusted R Squared = .061)

The Two-way ANOVA Test, statistically significant at 5%, revealed that burnout levels are significantly correlated with age and marital status. Employees who are 55 to 55 more years old and single suffer from higher burnout levels than others (Table 9).

Table 11. The two way ANOVA test descriptives results among participants tenure, marital status and the level of burnout

Tenure	Marital Status	MEAN	Std. deviation	N	Tenure	Marital Status	MEAN	Std. deviation	
Less than 1 year	Married	1.8205	.80064	13	1-4 Years	Married	1.6667	.87348	31
	Single	1.3846	.54171	13		Single	2.4000	1.06342	10
	TOTAL	1.6026	.70565	26		Divorced	2.6667	.	1
				TOTAL		1.8651	.96007	42	
5-8 Years	Married	2.1111	1.16311	39	9-12 Years	Married	2.1282	.58177	26
	Single	1.1667	.18257	6		Single	1.8333	.63828	4
	Divorced	-	-	-		Divorced	2.0000	.00000	2
	TOTAL	1.9852	1.13029	45		TOTAL	2.0833	.56796	32
13-15 Years	Married	2.5000	.79349	4	15 Years and more	Married	2.1489	.85737	235
	Single	2.6667	-	1		Single	3.5111	.94169	15
	Divorced	-	-	-		Divorced	1.6667	1.15470	3
	TOTAL	2.5333	.69121	5		TOTAL	2.1647	.86761	253

Table 12. The two way ANOVA test's results among participants tenure, marital status and the level of burnout

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	24.643 ^a	14	1.760	2.319	.004
Intercept	149.568	1	149.568	197.042	.000
Tenure	9.230	5	1.846	2.432	.035
Marital Status	.083	2	.041	.054	.947
Tenure*Marital Status	13.322	7	1.903	2.507	.016
Error	294.518	388	.759		
Total	2054.778	403			
Corrected Total	319.161	402			

Note: a R Squred = .077 (Adjusted R Squred = .044)

The Two-way ANOVA Test, statistically significant at 5%, revealed that burnout levels are significantly correlated with tenure and marital status. Those who have 15 or more years of tenure and single suffer from higher burnout levels than others (Table 11).

In the analysis of the relationship between the level of burnout and all three dimensions, one way Anova test was conducted. The results are given Table 13 and Table 14 below.

Table 13. One way Anova results between three dimensions and Burnout

		ANOVA				
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Emotional Exhaustion	Between Groups	252,540	74	3,413	11,679	,000
	Within Groups	95,845	328	,292		
	Total	348,385	402			
Depersonalization	Between Groups	173,122	74	2,339	9,653	,000
	Within Groups	79i493	328	,242		
	Total	252,615	402			
Sense of Personal Accomplishment	Between Groups	117,456	74	1,587	3,767	,000
	Within Groups	138,211	328	,421		
	Total	255,667	402			

Table 14. One way Anova Descriptive results between three dimensions and burnout

Descriptives			
	N	Mean	Std.Deviation
Emotional Exhaustion	403	2,1154	,93093
Depersonalization	403	1,7436	,79271
Sense of Personal Accomplishment	403	3,9057	,79749

According to the results of the ANOVA test, the relationship between the level of burnout and all three dimensions, were found significant at the 0.05 level statistically. When viewed to descriptive results of Anova Test, accordingly two dimensions means, participants' sense of personal accomplishment dimension mean was found to have higher mean value.

Conclusion

The purpose of the study is to determine the burnout levels of public employees in accordance with their demographic characteristics. It should be noted here that it is a more proper way to categorize individuals as employees with low, intermediate and high burnout levels rather than as “burned out” or “not burned out”. Accordingly, when personnel working in public office were evaluated on the basis of dimensions of burnout levels, the sense of personal accomplishment was found to have higher mean than the other two dimensions of burnout levels (emotional exhaustion and depersonalization). In other words, public employees were found to have high emotional exhaustion levels.

The study discovered that older employees have higher burnout levels than younger employees. Thus, it can be argued that young employees might quit their profession easily if they fail to cope with burnout whereas older employees are less successful in dealing with burnout by this way. As a result, younger employees are less likely to suffer from burnout than older ones.

Another finding of the study is that burnout levels get higher as the tenure increases. Among the types of reactions displayed by experienced employees to their profession are decreased self-sacrifice and retirement (Tugrul and Celik 2002:2; Izgar 2001:21).

Furthermore, the study concluded that single and older employees have higher burnout levels than others. This finding is supported by the view of Maslach, who argued that single employees experience more problems related to burnout than married ones. Güllüce(2006) attributed this view to the fact that affection and support of family members help one cope with emotional demands of a profession and lower burnout levels.

Finally, the study revealed that employees who have 15 or more years of tenure and single suffer from higher burnout levels than others. The finding seems to support that of

Stevens and O'Neill(1983), who maintained that experiences make individuals more realistic, decrease their expectation of appreciation from their customers or organizations and direct their attention and energy to other fields (Stevens and O'Neill 1983; Torun 1995).

All these findings suggest that burnout can be felt at different levels under different demographic variables. Any precaution towards improving organizational conditions of public employees will probably have a preventing effect on burnout. As a matter of fact, organizational regulations, which are likely to provide relatively more permanent results, as well as personal techniques, could reinforce the fact that burnout is a justifiable problem, and thus allow managers and employees to accept and thus prevent it in an easier way.

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