

Counterproductive Work Behaviors as an Outcome of Job Burnout among High School Teachers

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Abstract

The study was aimed at examining the role of job burnout in predicting counterproductive work behaviors (CWB) among high school teachers. Maslach Burnout Inventory-ES (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996) and Counterproductive Work Behavior Checklist-32 (Spector, Fox, Penney, Bruursema, Goh, and Kessler, 2006) were used to measure the constructs. The study comprised two phases. Phase-I of the study aimed at translating the scales from English into Urdu and the Phase-II of the study was carried out to explore the role of three factors of job burnout (including emotional exhaustion, reduced personal accomplishment and depersonalization) in predicting withdrawal abuse, and sabotage (the three forms of CWB). Multiple regression analysis revealed that reduced personal accomplishment and depersonalization were significant positive predictors of withdrawal and sabotage, whereas emotional exhaustion and depersonalization were found to be significant positive predictors of abuse. Limitations and implications have also been discussed.

Keywords: Job burnout, counterproductive work behaviors, withdrawal, abuse and sabotage.

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Introduction

Since the term was coined by Freudenberger (1974), job burnout has been a center of attention of researchers who scanned its negative impacts to the organization as well as to the health of individual employees themselves. It may deteriorate teaching by affecting classroom instructions and affecting the relationships of teachers with other educational stakeholders (Jackobson, 2016). However, little attention has been paid towards its effects on behavioral outcomes (e.g., counterproductive work behaviors) specifically in Pakistani culture (Aslam & Safdar, 2012). Present study aims at exploring the effects of job burnout on withdrawal, abuse and sabotage (the three forms of CWB).

Job burnout is a reaction to chronic stress which is characterized by emotional exhaustion (feeling of lack of emotional resources), cynicism (detachment from work in a robotic manner), and reduced personal accomplishment (negative evaluation of oneself about one's competence at work) among the employees who have to do some kind of people-work (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Therefore, bank employees, mental health professionals, nurses and teachers have been frequently reported to be common victims of job burnout (Aslam & Safdar, 2012; De Silva, Hewage, & Fonseka, 2009).

The effects of burnout, which are negative most of the times, include decreased levels job satisfaction, reduced performance and commitment, increased turnover intentions and use of violence (Gorji & Vaziri, 2011; Kop, Euwema, & Schaufeli, 1999; Marmaya, Zawawi, Hitam, & Jody, 2011; Matin, Kalali, & Anvari, 2012). Other consequences of job burnout include hopelessness, irritability, detachment from work and colleagues, absenteeism, impatience, moodiness, and less tolerance for others (John, 2007).

Job burnout results in several negative consequences particularly to the teachers. For instance, it causes job demands to cause poor health of the teachers as it mediates between these two constructs as well as it makes lack of resources to contribute to poor management among educators (Hakanen, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2006). López, Bolaño, Mariño, and Pol (2010) for example studied job burnout as an important variable of teaching malaise which includes those negative effects which harm the personality of teachers on permanent bases. John (2007) also reported, while he was studying the effects of social support and gender on teachers' burnout that teachers have to face much stress at work and therefore, they are more likely to develop burnout symptoms. In the indigenous culture of sub-continent, Azeem (2010) reported that commitment and personality hardiness significantly contribute to a heightened level of job burnout among university teachers. Other negative work outcomes including absenteeism (Schaufeli, Bakker, & Rhenen, 2009) and turnover intentions (Makhdoom, 2013) have also been found associated with high level of job burnout.

Counterproductive Work Behaviors (CWB)

The high levels of absenteeism and turnover intentions show another negative workplace behavior labeled as 'counterproductive work behaviors (CWBs) which are those harmful behaviors which are perpetrated with the clear aim of harming or hurting the employees, and/or organization (Spector & Fox, 2005). CWB is not a label measuring a single construct rather it is a cluster of workplace deviant behaviors which have been classified according to several categorization schemes one of which was proposed by Spector et al (2006). This scheme categorizes CWB into five categories including withdrawal, abuse, sabotage, theft, and production deviance.

Relationship between Job Burnout and CWB

In the present study only withdrawal, abuse and sabotage were studied as the outcome of job burnout because strong theoretical links have been found in literature for the relationship of job burnout and these types of CWB. The links of job burnout with withdrawal, abuse and sabotage are better understood when we take a close look at causal reasoning theory postulated by Martinko, Gundlach, and Douglas (2002). It suggests that the locus of causality shapes an employee's affective reactions which in turn, lead to the decision of committing CWB. They suggest that when negative events are attributed towards internal reasons, they often lead to negative feelings towards self, and reduced personal accomplishment). Similarly, anger arises when negative events are externally attributed, moreover both types of attributions accompanied by less control over events (which results in increased job burnout) stimulate the employees to direct their anger either towards themselves (e.g. absenteeism and other withdrawal behaviors) or towards the external environment (e.g. abuse & sabotage).

Withdrawal is a form of counterproductive work behaviors aims at hurting the organization by giving less time to organization than is actually required (Spector et al., 2006). Examples include absenteeism, taking long breaks, lateness, etc. It is not surprising to find that employees who are emotionally exhausted and perceive themselves as less accomplished with their work are too exhausted to put their energies on their work conscientiously. Instead, they withdraw from the working conditions which have forced them to experience such feelings of emotional exhaustion and inefficacy. This might be explained in terms of job-demand resource model (Jones & Fletcher, 1996) and compensatory regulatory-control model (Hockey, 1993, 1997).

According to job demand-resource model, job demands are the conditions which need to be completed and therefore, require efforts both physiological and psychological, and consequently cause strain (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001; Jones & Fletcher, 1996). According to Hockey's compensatory regulatory-control model (1993, 1997), employees who are in strain, invest their mental efforts in order to secure their benefits. In case of increased job demands, more mental efforts are utilized which result in depletion of energy leading the employees to experience burnout that consequently produces absenteeism (Schaufeli, Bakker, & Rhenen, 2009) and related behaviors of withdrawal from the organization. Similarly, it might happen that employees use withdrawal behaviors such as absenteeism as coping mechanisms in order to prevent themselves from stressful conditions which lead them to experience of emotional exhaustion and inefficacy at work (Kristensen, 1991). Previous researchers (see for example, Petitta & Vecchione, 2011; Schouteten, 2017) have found different withdrawal behaviors as the outcomes of job burnout for example absenteeism. Specifically sickness absenteeism has been observed as a major outcome of job burnout. Schaufeli, Bakker, and Rhenen (2009) for instance found that increased level of job burnout resulted in longer sick leaves among the telecom managers. Based on previous theory and research it is proposed that:

H₁: Emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment are positive predictors of withdrawal.

Moreover, the pressure resulting from job stress causes symptoms of job burnout including depletion of emotional resources (i.e., emotional exhaustion), bodily tiredness, anger, and lack of individual success at work (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001; Shukla & Trivedi, 2008) and the behavioral reactions to job related stress are represented through counterproductive work behaviors (Goh, 2006) among which abuse against others and sabotage are salient behaviors. Spector and colleagues (2006) stated that abuse against others is a form of CWB, which is aimed at hurting others at workplace physically and/or psychologically while sabotage involves harming or destroying the property of the employee or the organization. They found that abuse against others is the form of aggression which is directed towards the most direct cause of stress and therefore, it is safe to assume that when employees feel job burnout due to continuous stress, they become aggressive towards the source of stress which might result in increased level of abuse against others and sabotage.

Another theoretical notion, i.e., frustration-aggression hypothesis which was proposed by Fox and Spector (1999) provides bases for the relationship of job burnout with abuse and sabotage. This hypothesis proposes that aggressive behavior most of the time is the result of some frustration or stressor. Theorists have assumed emotional exhaustion, a symptom of job burnout, as a stressor for the employees and have observed that emotional exhaustion leads towards CWBs (Banks, Whelpley, Oh, & Shin, 2012)

such as abuse and sabotage. Similarly, negative states (e.g., emotional exhaustion, reduced personal accomplishment or cynicism) resulting from frustrating agents undermine positive cognitive processes such as rational considerations or normative behavioral considerations (Thau & Mitchell, 2010). Such states as depletion of emotional resources also inhibit employees to resist to temptation of CWBs (Gino, Schweitzer, Mead, & Ariely, 2011).

Job burnout results in increased use of alcohol (McDonald & Siegall, 2004), which often may cause workplace violence and aggression. Plausibly, when employees are more satisfied with their jobs and find themselves as more competent they are found to be more obligated to help others voluntarily in their work related tasks (Goo, Lee, & Brekashvili, 2009). In the same vein when they find themselves as less competent and less accomplished at their work they will feel less obligation to control their irritability and moodiness, which is a result of burnout (John, 2007), and consequently will be more abusive against others. Unfortunately, little attention has been paid towards the relationship of job burnout with abuse and sabotage. One such study was carried out by Queirós, da Silva, and Teixeira (2012) who studied a sample of police officers and observed that reduced personal accomplishment and emotional exhaustion were significant predictors of verbal aggressivity, hostility, irritability and total aggressivity. Therefore, on the bases of previous theory and research we hypothesize that:

H₂: Emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment are positive predictors of abuse against others.

H₃: Emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment are positive predictors of sabotage.

Research Methodology

The design of study as correlation and survey type in nature school teachers from public and private sectors were population of study.

Sample

The sample included school teachers ($N = 364$) from different private ($n = 204$) and public ($n = 160$) high schools from Sargodha division. Sample was further characterized as 184 female and 180 male. Only graduate teachers with B.Ed., having at least one year job experience at their current workplace, were included in the study. The age of the sample ranged from 22 to 55 years ($M = 32.63$, $SD = 8.99$).

Instruments

Following instruments were translated and then used in the present study:

Counterproductive Work Behavior Checklist-32

For the measurement of counterproductive work behaviors, Counterproductive Work Behavior Checklist-32 (Spector et al., 2006) was used which consists of 32 items and five factors including Sabotage, Withdrawal, Production Deviance, Theft, and Abuse. All items are anchored 7-point Likert scale where 0 = Never, 1 = Once a year, 2 = A few times a year, 3 = Once a month, 4 = A few times a month, 5 = Once a week, and 6 = Everyday. Reliability coefficients for total scale and Sabotage, Withdrawal, Production Deviance, Theft, and Abuse are .90, .81, .61, .42, .58, and .63 respectively (Spector et al., 2006). Withdrawal, Sabotage and Abuse sub-scales were used in the present study.

Maslach Burnout Inventory-ES

Maslach Burnout Inventory-ES (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996) is a teacher-specific version of Maslach Burnout Inventory. It includes 22 items and three subscales i.e. emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment, which are to be responded on a 7-point rating scale ranging from 0 = Never to 6 = Everyday. High scores on Exhaustion and Depersonalization and low score on Personal Accomplishment items are indicative of high level of job burnout. The reported reliabilities of the subscales are .76 for Depersonalization, .90 for Emotional Exhaustion, and .76 for Personal Accomplishment (Maslach, et al., 1996).

Procedure

The study was conducted in two phases i.e., Translation and Main Study. The aim of the translation phase was to translate the scales used in the study and assure their psychometrics. The scales were translated through following the guidelines of committee approach suggested by European Social Survey (2012) and were administered on a sub-sample of school teachers ($N = 100$). In final meeting of the translation committee, the results of tryout were studied and the items with lower, reverse or non-significant item-total correlation were removed from the scales. In Phase II, finalized scales were administered on a sample of high school teachers. Permissions were sought from the concerned authorities, and the teachers were approached in staff-rooms or their offices. After providing written as well as verbal instructions the scales were handed over to them that were collected from them in next visit to the schools. In the end, the authorities as well as the teachers were thanked for their cooperation and participation in the research.

Results

Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, Correlations and Alpha Reliabilities for the Scales Used in the Study (N = 364)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	α	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1	--	.15**	.42***	.19***	.21***	.19***	.73	10.91	9.03
2	--	--	.24***	.18**	.10*	.16**	.64	9.31	7.67
3	--	--	--	.26***	.22***	.28***	.50	3.28	4.10
4	--	--	--	--	.30***	.26***	.60	1.67	2.49
5	--	--	--	--	--	.14**	.88	3.61	7.35
6	--	--	--	--	--	--	.55	.29	1.28

Note. 1 = emotional exhaustion; 2 = reduced personal accomplishment; 3 = depersonalization; 4 = withdrawal; 5 = abuse; 6 = sabotage.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 1 describes that correlations among all the pair of variables are significant and positive. A relatively weak but still significant correlation might be observed between Reduced Personal Accomplishment and Abuse.

Table 2

Multiple Regression Analysis for Emotional Exhaustion, Reduced Personal Accomplishment and Depersonalization Predicting Withdrawal, Abuse and Sabotage (N = 364)

Variables	Withdrawal			Abuse			Sabotage		
	β	ΔR^2	<i>F</i>	β	ΔR^2	<i>F</i>	β	ΔR^2	<i>F</i>
Emotional Exhaustion	.09			.14*			.08		
Reduced Personal Accomplishment	.12*	.081	11.70***	.05	.059	8.54***	.10*	.082	11.82***
Depersonalization	.20**			.15*			.22***		

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 2 describes emotional exhaustion, reduced personal accomplishment and depersonalization as predictors of withdrawal, abuse and sabotage. It suggests that the independent variables cause 8.9% variance in withdrawal ($R^2 = .089$), 6.6% variance in abuse ($R^2 = .066$) and 8.2% variance in sabotage ($R^2 = .082$). Model 1, Model 2 and Model 3 are found to be significant with $\{F(3, 361) = 11.70, p < .001\}$, $\{F(3, 361) = 8.54, p < .001\}$ and $\{F(3, 361) = 11.82, p < .001\}$ respectively. Among the predictors reduced personal accomplishment ($\beta = .12, t = 2.24, p < .05$) and depersonalization ($\beta = .20, t = 3.51, p < .01$) are significant predictors of withdrawal; emotional exhaustion ($\beta = .14, t = 2.53, p < .05$) and depersonalization ($\beta = .15, t = 2.53, p < .05$) significantly predict abuse; and reduced personal accomplishment ($\beta = .10, t = 1.90, p < .05$) and depersonalization ($\beta = .22, t = 3.87, p < .001$) are significant positive predictors of sabotage.

Discussion

The present study was an endeavor to inspect whether facets of job burnout predict withdrawal, abuse, and sabotage. It was hypothesized that emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment will positively predict these forms of counterproductive work behaviors, among high school employees. Reduced personal accomplishment and depersonalization significantly predicted while emotional exhaustion did not predict withdrawal among teachers providing partial support to the first hypothesis of the study.

The Regulatory-Control model (Hockey, 1993, 1997) states that when employees experience strain, they begin to transact their energies to protect their benefits. More strain demands more energies to cope with the situation. Therefore, it is not surprising that the employees who find themselves less successful at work and who cope with the stress by treating others, as if they are not human-beings but impersonal objects (i.e. depersonalization), are more likely to withdraw from their workplace by increased level of absenteeism or turnover intention (Sims, 2007).

Moreover, an employee who is high at reduced personal accomplishment and depersonalization, is less likely to be engaged with his work and is more alienated from the work, which is another form of withdrawal (du Plooy & Roodt, 2010). Previous researches also support such relationship. Consiglio, Borgogni, Alessandri, and Schaufeli (2013), for example found that job burnout resulted in sickness absenteeism. Emotional exhaustion was not found to be a predictor of withdrawal among the sample. One reason might be the theoretical background of this construct. Emotional exhaustion is the dimension of burnout which does not include the interpersonal aspect of burnout that individuals have at their workplace (Maslach, et al., 2001). Typically CWBs such as withdrawal emerge from organizational constraints (Spector et al., 2006), as well as interpersonal conflicts (Miles, Boreman, Spector, & Fox, 2002; Spector et al., 2006). Similarly, withdrawal behaviors are more the products of constraints, conflicts and low level of perceived justice while emotional exhaustion is merely the stress dimension of job burnout (Maslach, et al., 2001). Therefore, the results postulating no prediction of withdrawal by emotional exhaustion are justified.

Among the predictors of abuse, emotional exhaustion and depersonalization were found to be significant while, reduced personal accomplishment did not predict abuse. According to frustration-aggression hypothesis (Fox & Spector, 1999) the symptoms of job burnout are the result of stress at work and stressors cause frustration among the employees. Therefore, it is not surprising to note that emotionally exhausted employees who take individuals at their workplace as non-human objects, direct their frustration towards themselves and the result is increased level of abuse against others.

Researchers have paid little if any attention towards the direct link of these variables. However, some similar constructs to job burnout have been studied as predictors of CWBs. For instance stress, which is the most prominent cause of job burnout, leads towards counterproductive work behaviors. Aftab and Javeed (2012) studied in a sample of bank employees from Pakistan and noted that job stress is an important contributor of CWBs at workplace. The results are in line with those of Makhdoom (2013) who observed a sample from Pakistan and noted a strong positive relationship between emotional exhaustion and abuse.

On the other hand, there is reduced personal accomplishment, which has been found weakly associated with abuse and has not been found a predictor of abuse. The results can be better understood when we take a closer look at individual efficacy beliefs. Individual efficacy beliefs postulated by Bandura (1986) are the beliefs about what one can do with his/her skills. By definition, these beliefs have a close link to reduced personal accomplishment. Reduced personal accomplishment, which has also been labeled as inefficacy, is the perceived lack of accomplishments and achievements at work (Makhdoom, 2013; Maslach et al., 2001). Therefore, one might assume that the employees' individual efficacy beliefs might contribute to the development of reduced personal accomplishment. However, researchers (e.g., Jex & Gudanowski, 1992) have found a weak relationship of these beliefs and frustration. Therefore, theoretically it is safe to assume that reduced personal accomplishment has nothing to do with abuse against others, and therefore, the results of present study are justified.

The results of third hypothesis revealed that except emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment were significant positive predictors of sabotage (which is deliberately harming the property of the organization). The results can better be understood if we examine how locus of control contributes to the burnout dimensions. It has usually been observed that external locus of control (which is the personality dimension regarding people's concerns that reinforcement in their lives are controlled by external factors) are more likely to experience symptoms of job burnout (Sunbul, 2003).

Therefore, it is not surprising to find out that depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishments contribute significantly for counterproductive work behaviors such as sabotage. On the other hand there is emotional exhaustion which was not found to be a significant predictor of sabotage. The results are contrary to the assumptions of previous researchers. For instance Banks, Whelpley, Oh, and Shin (2012) found a weak but significant positive relationship between emotional exhaustion and CWB organization, which is similar to sabotage. One justification of such results goes back to the theory of emotional exhaustion where Maslach, et al., (2001) suggest that emotional

exhaustion is less related to lack of resources (which can direct the revengeful behaviors of the employees towards its assets) rather it is related to social conflict which might result in use of violence, as frustration-aggression hypothesis suggests, against the employees and other persons at work (i.e., high abuse) but not towards the assets of the organization (i.e., sabotage).

Conclusions

The present study was an attempt to investigate the role of job burnout in counterproductive work behaviors including abuse, withdrawal and sabotage. The results revealed that reduced personal accomplishment and depersonalization were significant contributor of withdrawal and sabotage; while emotional exhaustion and depersonalization significantly predicted abuse among school teachers.

Recommendations

Like all other studies, the present study was not void of flaws. The study revealed that job burnout was a significant predictor of CWB but it could not unveil how the burnout dimensions were associated with CWB dimensions. For instance, it did not conclude why emotional exhaustion was not found to be a predictor of sabotage when all theoretical paths lead to this relationship. Future researchers should consider other paths, for instance presence of some mediator or moderator variable, for the relationship of these variables. Moreover, as the study relied solely on self-report measures that might entice social desirability and could have defaced the true picture of results. Future researchers should consider multi method approach in order to validate the results of self-report measures.

Notwithstanding the fact of certain limitations the present study also provides valuable findings to the theory and practice for these variables. Present study adds to the literature of CWB while finding out that job burnout causes a significant handsome amount of variance in CWB. On practical level, present research tend to warn the administration of the schools to take serious steps to reduce teachers' job burnout or otherwise, the consequences might be far more disastrous than those are generally expected. Moreover, the policy makers should take serious steps to sort out indigenous factors which contribute to teachers' burnout at school levels in particular and other teachers in general. Further, they should design the policies which may decrease the stressors experienced by teachers and thus, would be helpful in decreasing the level of burnout.

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