DOI: 10.21554/hrr.042519

The Effect of Professional Burnout on the Performance of Academic Staff in Higher Education in Kosova

Original scientific paper

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Received: 2024/04/29
Accepted: 2024/09/14

Abstract

This research is focused on the level of burnout among academic staff workers in higher education and aims to examine the effects that this phenomenon causes, as well as whether these people show signs of wear and tear from the many loads they have in their efforts to achieve high performance. The primary data were obtained through a survey with the academic staff using the MBI (Maslach Burnout Inventory) assessment. We reveal that the academic staff show symptoms of burnout at a medium level; most of them are not satisfied with their personal achievement, indicating the effects that burnout has on their performance. We also show that there were no differences or any significant relationship between demographics and burnout levels, except for age. The results of this study reveal that the less experienced staff have more energy in the beginning, then go through struggles until they adapt and are able to reach stability in the years close to retirement. There was also a discrepancy in the means between the factors leading to burnout, but this comes due to mental health at the workplace stigma.

***Keywords**: Burnout, Performance, Academic Staff, Higher Education*

In light of the manifold challenges facing higher education and the pressing need for constant innovation, the phenomenon of work-related burnout has become an all-too-common occurrence. The increasingly diverse nature of work in today's society often demands that individuals juggle overloaded tasks, navigate complex interpersonal dynamics, and contend with poor working conditions and a host of other challenges. As a result, many individuals are experiencing heightened levels of stress and emotional exhaustion, leading them to become increasingly detached and disengaged from their work. This state of psychological and emotional depletion, commonly known as burnout, represents a significant public health concern in modern society.

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According to Freudenberger (1974), who initially tried to explain burnout, this phenomenon arises because of high levels of stress and the accompanying sense of responsibility that is inherent in professions that involve providing assistance to others. Although it was said to exist only in humanitarian fields, burnout was later divided into other elements that have carried the term until today. Authors Maslach and Jackson (1981) have divided burnout into 3 points: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and personal achievement. In a similar study, Alwaely and Jarrah (2020) found that the level of burnout among Al Ain professors turned out to be moderate and the higher the level of burnout, the lower their learning performance. Performance in the workplace is a crucial aspect that requires careful consideration of the various factors that can lead to burnout. It is imperative to ensure that one is not merely discharging their duties out of obligation but rather with a sense of passion and purpose. The creation of a positive work environment, bolstered by the support of colleagues and staff, working in favorable conditions, and achieving significant milestones are critical in mitigating fatigue and enhancing job satisfaction. These factors create a sense of belonging and value, fostering a positive outlook on one's work.

The present study aims to examine the impact of burnout on academic staff members and investigate whether demographic variables influence the experience of burnout. Along with an extensive literature review, this research also includes empirical findings and analyses. The variables used in this study are gender, age, experience, as well as emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal achievement, as they are integral components of the inventory. The ultimate goal of this study is to provide a comprehensive understanding of burnout among academic staff members and identify potential strategies for mitigating its negative effects.

Literature Review

Individuals who work in busy environments, whether or not they experience pressure, may be susceptible to work-related stressors and intense emotions, including stress, anger, fatigue, fear, and despair. These emotions can often be triggered by social or crowded settings, leading to a state of exhaustion or burnout. Taris (2006) says that this exhaustion can relate the stressors of this exhaustion to performance as our energies are also consumed which we use to perform work, implying that when the levels of exhaustion increase, the energy of people to perform work also falls. In the US, about 20% of the academic staff had experienced high levels of burnout before the pandemic, while this had doubled after the pandemic (Yesantharao, et al., 2023). Another study Peter et al. (2019) conducted in Australia found that although employees experienced high levels of burnout and engagement, they still reported high levels of job satisfaction and that job resources (e.g., social support and autonomy) played a role in this relationship.

Based on research from various scholarly articles analyzing burnout, performance, and demographic variables (Alwaely & Jarrah, 2020; Khan & Anwar, 2019), the data gathered suggests that females tend to exhibit a higher degree of burnout than males. Some of the influencers were multiple overloads, administrative work, work from home, low salary, poor organizational climate, fatigue, pressure, work environment, etc. Other studies (Lou, et al., 2022; Mota, Lopes, & Oliveira, 2021; Demerouti, Bakker, & Leiter, 2014; MANTILLA & DÍAZ, 2017; Brouwers & Tomic, 2000) found levels of burnout, but most interestingly, found that workers used different techniques to prevent burnout and recommended that the staff needs to be included in different programs or trainings about managing these kinds of problems at the workplace. Additional studies (Wulantika, Ayusari, & Wittine, 2023; Peasley, Hochstein, Britton, Srivastava, & Stewart, 2020; Turtulla, 2017) found that management and government entities have a crucial role to play in this regard; their support can enhance the performance and welfare of these professionals.

What Causes Burnout? - According to Maslach and Leiren (1997), burnout has many influencing factors, but among the most important are "work overload, lack of control, insufficient reward, community breakdown, lack of justice and conflicting values".

Consider a scenario where one is employed and strives to enhance the company's productivity by accomplishing tasks within

a shorter time frame. Despite working overtime, the workload persists, and without realizing it, one begins to carry work home. While the vigor and vitality to accomplish everything may be present in younger years, as time elapses and additional responsibilities outside work are included, one's energy gradually wanes. The observed surge in workload is of concern, as it appears to be primarily driven by a focus on quantity rather than quality of work. As such, it is imperative that time and work plans be managed more effectively to mitigate this issue. Failure to do so may result in a loss of control over work-life balance, which could lead to personal difficulties and potentially cause us to lose sight of our overarching mission. Starting a work project with a lot of energy and maintaining that momentum for a long time can only work if the worker is fairly paid. Unfortunately, some companies try to pay as little as possible while expecting a lot of work, which can lead to low motivation and other problems. Workers not only need rewards, but also a team to function better. While working alone can be effective in some cases, having colleagues for support and division of labor can be very helpful. It is important for companies to be transparent and fair with their workers. When workers are aware of what is happening around them and receive mutual respect, they tend to be more loyal to the company. On the other hand, if workers feel mistreated or undervalued, they may lose faith in the company. This can lead to internal conflict and affect both personal and professional life. Small issues can quickly escalate into bigger problems, leading to negative consequences. Therefore, it is crucial for companies to treat their workers with respect and fairness to maintain a positive work environment.

How to Prevent Burnout - It is crucial to maintain a positive work environment that benefits both individuals and teams in terms of personal and professional growth. To achieve this, teamwork, effective communication, management support, and promoting mental health are essential. It is also essential to ensure that work-related concerns do not affect the personal lives of employees. According to a study by Gabriel and Aguinis (2022) considering the management part and the human resources department in this aspect, they developed five aspects that can help different organizations prevent or fight this consumption by offering workers interventions for stress management, to allow them to be active creators, to encourage and support them in the social part, to engage workers in the decision-making process, and to implement higher quality performance management. Undoubtedly, all these factors can help to reduce or prevent health issues, but the most important role is played by the individual. It is essential to take care of one's health and not hesitate to seek help when needed. Mental health is often considered a taboo topic in our culture, but by starting to talk and share with others, we can break the stigma for those who may be going through the same struggles as us.

Performance - Authors Banfield and Kay (2018) interpret performance as a relationship between a person's practical skills and what that person achieves, that is, related to one's work. It is widely believed that happy workers tend to work better, and this is because there is a direct correlation between the performance of employees, the performance of the company, and the well-being of the workers. A company that is committed to promoting well-being and providing a healthy work environment is more likely to have a productive workforce. On the other hand, if employees are not well taken care of, they are likely to become demotivated, leading to poor work performance and eventually, burnout. Therefore, it is essential for both companies and workers to prioritize their well-being in order to foster a healthy work culture and ensure a productive workforce. Professors in different fields engage in a variety of teaching and research activities. However, when they experience this syndrome, their mental health tends to deteriorate. This can lead to negative thoughts and affect their performance. (Padillaa, Boniventob, & Suarez, 2017).

Methodology

The data were collected through an online questionnaire distributed via email to academic staff in public and private universities in Kosovo. The data for this research was collected from 100 participants who work in the academic field. Of the total participants, 44% were female and 56% were male. The age groups were divided as follows: 34% were between the ages

of 24 and 34, 36% were between 35 and 44, 22% were between 45 and 54, and 8% were between 55 and 64. The experience levels were categorized as follows: 17% had 0-5 years of experience, 36% had 6-11 years of experience, 32% had 12-20 years of experience, and 15% had more than 20 years of experience. Participants voluntarily took part in the research by completing an inventory from a distributed link, and only age, gender, and experience data were collected due to privacy concerns. The Instrument used for this research was MBI - Maslach Burnout inventory (Maslach, Jackson, & E, 1981) which has 22 questions that are divided into three scales: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and personal achievement.

MBI is a well-established instrument for measuring burnout, considering many studies have used this instrument, such as Prentice and Thaichon (2019) connecting burnout with job performance, as well as different systematic reviews and meta-analyses like Parandeh et al (2022). This assessment consists of questions that are answered on a Likert scale with 7 degrees ranging from 0 (never) to 6 (always). The scale is divided into three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal achievements. A score of over 27 on emotional exhaustion indicates a high level, 17-26 indicates a medium level, and 0-16 indicates a low level. A score of over 13 on depersonalization indicates a high level, 7-12 indicates a medium level, and 0-6 indicates a low level. Similarly, for personal achievement, a score of above 39 indicates a high level, 32-38 indicates a medium level, and 0-31 indicates a low level.

Initially, to prove the accuracy and reliability of the instrument (MBI), Cronbach's Alpha test was used, which reached a high level of 0.871. Additionally, since MBI is divided into three factors, the validity of the three was made individually, where it reached these results: Emotional Exhaustion (EE) Cronbach's Alpha is 0.83 high, Depersonalization (Dp) Cronbach's Alpha is 0.78 and Personal Achievement (PA) Cronbach' Alpha is 0.83, thus indicating a high degree of acceptability (>0.70.)

The hypotheses for this research are:

H1. The academic staff experience burnout

H2. Burnout affects the performance of the academic staff

H3. The academic staff are satisfied with their work achievements

H4.1 There is a significant difference between burnout and gender

H4.2 There is a significant difference between the levels of burnout and years of experience

H4.3 There is a negative correlation between burnout and age

Results

Before conducting hypothesis testing, we perform a correlation analysis to determine if there is a relationship between the given data sets.

Table 1.
Correlations of the 3 Factors

Correlations

		Level of EE	Level of Dp	Level of PA
Level of EE	Pearson Correlation	1	.477**	-.185
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.065
	N	100	100	100
Level of Dp	Pearson Correlation	.477**	1	-.507**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000
	N	100	100	100
Level of PA	Pearson Correlation	-.185	-.507**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.065	.000	
	N	100	100	100

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Upon analyzing the provided table, it becomes apparent that the values of 0.477 suggest a positive correlation between emotional exhaustion and depersonalization with a significance value of 0.00<0.05, while with - 0.185 between EE and PA with a sig 0.065>0.05, and PA with DP with - 0.507 suggest a negative correlation, and a significance 0.00<0.05. In other words, as one variable increases, the other variable decreases. This phenomenon is similar to the way MBI operates, where higher levels of DP and EE lead to a decrease in PA levels. After examining the table, it is evident that emotional exhaustion and depersonalization have a positive correlation with a value of 0.477, which is statistically significant with a significance value of 0.00<0.05. However, there appears to be a weak negative correlation between emotional exhaustion and personal achievement with a value of -0.185 and a significance value of 0.065>0.05. Additionally, a strong negative correlation between personal achievement and depersonalization with a value of -0.507 and a significance value of 0.00<0.05 has been observed. This implies that as one variable increases, the other variable decreases. This pattern is consistent with MBI's operation, where higher levels of depersonalization and emotional exhaustion result in lower levels of personal achievement.

H1. The academic staff experience burnout

Table 2.

Statistics Table

Statistics

		Level of EE	Level of Dp	Level of PA
N	Valid	100	100	100
	Missing	0	0	0
Mean		1.34	2.29	1.61
Median		1.00	3.00	1.00
Mode		1	3	1
Std. Deviation		.572	.856	.737
Percentiles	25	1.00	1.00	1.00
	50	1.00	3.00	1.00
	75	2.00	3.00	2.00

According to Table 2, the data was divided into three groups - group 1 (low), group 2 (medium) and group 3 (high). From the results, we can see that for Emotional Exhaustion, the mean is 1.34 and the standard deviation is 0.572. For Depersonalization, the mean is 2.29 and the standard deviation is 0.856. Lastly, for Personal Achievement, the mean is 1.61 and the standard deviation is 0.737. Each of these means was on the path towards higher levels. After summing up the factors, the results for the level of burnout were obtained. It is important to note that 55% of the respondents showed high levels of disconnection and feelings of numbness in the Depersonalization factor, even though there were only a few in the first factor of Emotional Exhaustion.

Table 3.
Level of Burnout

Level of burnout

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	low	31	31.0	31.0	31.0
	medium	39	39.0	39.0	70.0
	high	30	30.0	30.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

After analyzing each factor, we identified three levels of burnout. Although some of the results did not correspond with each other, this could be due to the stigma and culture that still exist in Kosovar society, not only in responding to questionnaires, but also in answering questions about mental health. Table 3 shows that 31% of individuals experience rare symptoms or have a low level of burnout, while 39% display symptoms or have a medium level of burnout, and 30% have a high level of burnout. Therefore, academic staff members currently experience burnout at a medium level, which may increase or decrease in the future.

H2. Burnout affects the performance of the academic staff

Table 4.
KMO and Barlett's Test

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.849
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1286.232
	df	231
	Sig.	.000

The MBI questionnaire with 22 questions underwent factorial and reliability analysis. In a study by Forne and Yugero (2022), KMO resulted also high and only the first factors that extracted with the values above 1 were collected. From Table 4 we can see that KMO for the questionnaire is 0.849 which indicates a high level of trust from the data, also the Chi-square shows a correlation between the variables with a sig 0,000<0.05 which shows that the data is suitable for the model.

Table 5.
Total Variance Explained

Total Variance Explained

	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
Component	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	8.334	37.882	37.882	8.334	37.882	37.882	7.435	33.793	33.793
2	3.096	14.073	51.955	3.096	14.073	51.955	3.699	16.812	50.605
3	1.378	6.262	58.217	1.378	6.262	58.217	1.448	6.581	57.186
4	1.140	5.184	63.401	1.140	5.184	63.401	1.367	6.215	63.401
5	.977	4.439	67.840						
6	.885	4.021	71.861						
7	.839	3.813	75.674						
8	.755	3.432	79.105						
9	.600	2.725	81.831						
10	.539	2.449	84.280						
11	.495	2.251	86.531						
12	.446	2.028	88.559						
13	.408	1.855	90.414						
14	.372	1.693	92.107						
15	.332	1.511	93.618						
16	.319	1.448	95.065						
17	.255	1.158	96.223						
18	.217	.987	97.211						
19	.192	.871	98.082						
20	.170	.771	98.853						
21	.148	.672	99.525						
22	.105	.475	100.000						

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Based on the Eigen values in Table 5, we can observe that the data has yielded four factors. Factor 1 accounts for the highest percentage of total variance with 33.793%, followed by Factor 2 with 16.812%, Factor 3 with 6.581%, and Factor 4 with 6.215%. Together, these four factors represent 63.401% of the total variance.

Table 6.
Cronbach's Alpha

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.923	.925	13

Based on the data collected from the Eigen values in Table 5, we see that the reliability value according to Cronbach's Alpha for the independent variables of the first factor reached a very high level of reliability 0.923 (Table 6).

Table 7.
Anova Table

ANOVA

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Between People		1706.231	99	17.235		
Within People	Between Items	249.708	12	20.809	15.633	.000
	Residual	1581.369	1188	1.331		
	Total	1831.077	1200	1.526		
Total		3537.308	1299	2.723		

Grand Mean = 1.82

It is clear from the Anova analysis (Table 7) that Burnout's variables significantly impact academic staff performance in higher education, as proven by a significance value of less than 0.05. H3. The academic staff are satisfied with their work achievements

Table 8.
Level of PA
Level of PA

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	low	54	54.0	54.0	54.0
	medium	31	31.0	31.0	85.0
	high	15	15.0	15.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

According to the survey results on personal achievement (Table 8), 54% of the respondents reported having a low level of satisfaction at work, 31% reported a medium level, and only 15% reported being happy with their personal achievements.

Table 9.
Independent Sample T'-test

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					
								95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Level of PA	Equal variances assumed	.001	.981	.863	98	.391	.128	.149	-.167	.423
	Equal variances not assumed			.862	92.284	.391	.128	.149	-.167	.424

It appears that both men and women in the workplace are not satisfied with their jobs. The data in Table 9 shows that there were no significant differences in gender and personal achievement in job satisfaction. Out of 54 respondents who reported low levels of job satisfaction, 33 were men and 21 were women. For those who reported medium levels of satisfaction, there were 16 women and 15 men, while for those who reported high levels of satisfaction, there were 7 women and 8 men.

When it comes to age, those between the ages of 24-34, 22 reported low levels of satisfaction, 8 medium, and 4 high; those between 35-44, 23 reported low levels, 8 medium, and 5 high; those between 45-54, 6 reported low levels, 12 medium, and 4 high; those between 55-64, 3 reported low levels, 3 medium, and 2 high.

Regarding work experience, those with 0-5 years of experience, 12 reported low levels of satisfaction, 3 medium, and 2 high; those with 6-11 years of experience, 18 reported low levels, 12 medium, and 6 high; those with 12-20 years of experience, 20 reported low levels, 6 medium, and 6 high; those with 20+ years of experience, 4 reported low levels, 10 medium, and 1 high.

In conclusion, there were no significant differences between gender and job satisfaction. However, when it comes to age, there was a higher level of dissatisfaction among younger workers, which improved as they gained more experience in the field. There were no significant differences in work experience, but job satisfaction tended to start low due to the new workplace environment and improve over time.

H4.1 There is a significant difference between burnout and gender

Table 10.

Independent Sample T-test

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Level of burnout	Equal variances assumed	3.276	.073	-1.173	98	.244	-.185	.158	-.498	.128
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.154	85.894	.252	-.185	.160	-.504	.134

Based on the data presented in Table 10, the significance value is greater than 0.05, which leads us to conclude that there is no noticeable difference in burnout levels between men and women; hence, we are not able to reject the null hypothesis.

Both genders are equally at risk of experiencing high levels of burnout.

H4.2 There is a significant difference between the levels of burnout and years of experience

Table 11.

Anova Table

ANOVA

Working experience

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	3.470	2	1.735	1.973	.145
Within Groups	85.280	97	.879		
Total	88.750	99			

Looking at Table 11, we can observe that the significance is 0.145, which is greater than 0.05 and means that there are no differences between the groups. From the working experience 0 – 5, there were 4 with low levels, 4 with medium and 9 with high levels of burnout. From 6 – 11 years of experience, there were 11 with low levels, 16 with medium and 9 with high levels. From 12 – 20 years of experience, 11 were with low levels, 11 with medium and 10 with high levels of burnout. From 20 + years of experience, there were 5 with low levels, 8 with medium and 2 with high levels of burnout.

H4.3 There is a negative correlation between burnout and age

Table 12.
Correlations Table

Correlations

		Level of burnout	Age
Level of burnout	Pearson Correlation	1	-.273**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.006
	N	100	100
2.Mosha	Pearson Correlation	-.273**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.006	
	N	100	100

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

From Table 12 we can see that there is a negative correlation (-0.273) which is also significant with a value 0.006, which is greater than 0.05. So, we can reject the null hypothesis and accept our hypothesis that age is correlated negatively with burnout levels, which indicates that lower ages tend to experience more burnout which then lowers with more experience. In a meta-analysis, Gomez et al. (2017) also noticed age as a factor especially in higher levels of depersonalization and emotional exhaustion but not in personal achievement.

Discussion

After having analyzed the collected data, we observe that the academic staff did not experience high levels of burnout. However, there is still a significant amount of dissatisfaction in the workplace that needs to be addressed. This feeling of exhaustion can affect their performance and cause them to lose empathy for themselves, their coworkers, and their students. Burnout is a concerning phenomenon with negative impacts on both our performance and well-being. “Burnout has a direct negative impact on job performance. The higher the burnout, the lower the job performance, while the reverse is the opposite” (Pan, 2017). It is crucial to acknowledge and actively work towards improving both dissatisfaction and burnout in the workplace. It's worth noting that the individuals who completed the questionnaire were unaware of whether or not they were experiencing burnout. Additionally, it was observed that there was no difference in burnout levels between genders, but there was a correlation with age. Respondents tended to experience higher levels of dissatisfaction and burnout at the beginning of their careers, which then decreased, and later increased again.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of burnout on the academic staff in higher education in Kosovo. Burnout is a serious issue that can significantly affect our lives. However, with effort and a strong desire to improve our performance and well-being, it is possible to overcome it. This was a new topic for the academic community in Kosovo as there was no other data available on burnout in this field. The questionnaire was designed to avoid questions related to the same factor (dp/ee/pa) being too similar to each other,

but despite this, some discrepancies were found in the responses. This may be due to a cultural reluctance to express emotional problems that could affect our well-being. In Kosovo, there is still a stigma attached to admitting work-related exhaustion, and people may fear being judged. The results also showed that age is a factor, revealing that younger staff are not treated equally in the labour market, especially in the academic field.

Recommendations

It is important to view burnout not as a psychological illness to be feared, but rather as a period during which we need to work on ourselves and prioritize our own needs. Academic staff should not be overloaded due to their energy levels or age, nor should their motivation be taken advantage of. Those who give the most are often the most vulnerable to burnout. Managers should implement various stress management techniques, time management strategies, and other forms of training that have a positive impact on employees' performance.

It is also recommended that each academic staff member have access to an external supervisor whom they can speak with at least twice a month if they have any concerns which they feel uncomfortable sharing with a fellow staff member due to privacy concerns. Setting boundaries at work, taking written or rest breaks when necessary, and avoiding self-harming behaviors like isolating oneself from others or ignoring signs of fatigue are all important steps to prevent burnout. Achieving a work-life balance is key, and above all else, everyone should prioritize their mental health in the workplace.

Future studies could examine burnout levels from the perspective of private and public higher education institutions to observe any difference there may be amongst these distinct types of institutions. Moreover, burnout antecedents could be explored, with a main focus on how cultural aspects in Kosovo affect the levels of burnout, but also the awareness of the academic staff that they are experiencing burnout.

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