

# **Job Burnout, Individual Coping Styles And Well-Being at Work: A Comparative Study of Men and Women Employees of A Private Enterprise**

**\*Vinita Sinha**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Burnout, a phenomenon that has been widely acknowledged as an important issue among people helping professionals, still lacks both precise theoretical foundations and substantial empirical support. Its conceptual and operational definitions vary widely. The broadcast definitions equate Burnout with stress, connect it with a long list of adverse health and well being variables and suggest that it is caused by relentless pursuit of success. Burnout has been related to human service professions with chronic inter-personal stress as its caused (Maslach and Jackson, 1981). It is conceived as a state of mental, physical and emotional exhaustion, typically occurring as a result of long-term involvement with people in situations, which are emotionally demanding. Burnout can be defined as the end result of stress experienced, but not properly coped with resulting in symptoms of exhaustion, irritation, ineffectiveness, discounting of self, others and problems of health (Hypertension, Ulcers and Heart Problems).

What exactly is burnout? It may also be defined as “exhaustion of physical or emotional strength or motivation usually as a result of prolonged stress or frustration.” Who’s stressed and frustrated? Many are afraid of losing their jobs and are, therefore, working harder and longer hours to prove their worth. Survivors of layoffs have to work harder to fill the gaps left by their departed colleagues. Then there are those who work hard and don’t receive the gratitude they feel they deserve from their bosses. They go to work everyday, work hard, and don’t feel they are rewarded properly. Raises aren’t forthcoming, and promotions aren’t either. Being in the wrong career is also very stressful and can be frustrating. Many people are in the wrong career. They either tire of a career they once liked or they chose poorly in the first place. Others are in the right career but in the wrong job. Either way, a change may be in order. It may involve a career change or simply a change in where you work. So, as we can see, there are many factors that cause people stress and frustration with their jobs. Burnout doesn’t happen only to those who are stressed or frustrated, though. Notice the definition says burnout usually happens as a result of stress and frustration. Many of us work long hours because we actually like our jobs. We have work that needs to get done, and we choose to spend ten hours a day doing it. Then one day, we realize that many months have passed since we had a vacation, a full weekend off, or even a relaxing evening at home. There’s an old saying that goes “On their death bed, no one ever said, ‘I wish I had spent more time in the office.’” As an aside, the man who coined the term “burnout” was a psychologist named Herbert Freudenthal. Dr. Freudenthal, himself, had a reputation for working extremely long hours but did not experience burnout.

Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter (2001) describe job burnout as a psychological syndrome that occurs in response to chronic interpersonal stressors on the job. It has three key dimensions. Overwhelming exhaustion, which represents the basic individual stress dimension and includes feelings of being overextended and depleted of one’s emotional and physical resources. Feelings of cynicism, depersonalisation and detachment from the job, which represents the interpersonal, contextual dimension, and includes a negative, callous or excessively detached response to various aspects of the job. A sense of ineffectiveness and lack of accomplishment, which refers to the self-evaluation dimension, and includes reduced feelings of efficacy and accomplishment, feelings of incompetence, a lack of achievement and a lack of productivity.

Burnout research had its roots in care giving and service occupations, where aid and service to people in need is given and where emotional and interpersonal stressors are evident. Early interviews with human-service workers identified that coping strategies had important implications for people’s professional identity and job behaviour. Importantly, burnout was seen not so much as an individual stress response but in terms of the person’s transactions

---

\*Assistant Professor (HR), Symbiosis Centre for Management and Human Resource Development (SCMHRD), Pune.  
Email : vinitasinha167@gmail.com

in the workplace, with attention to emotions and the motives and values underlying the person's work. The rewards and costs of relationships are important.

The concept of burnout received increasing research attention, and was extended from human services to education and other occupations (such as clerical, military and managers), maintaining a focus on the transaction between the person and the organisational environment.

Burnout is associated with negative effects on job performance (absenteeism, intention to leave, turnover, lower productivity, lower effectiveness, reduced job satisfaction and reduced commitment) and stress-related physical illnesses. The authors write that the relationship between burnout and mental health appears to be complex, with the common assumption being that burnout precipitates anxiety, depression, lowered self-esteem and so on. However, an alternative argument is that people who are already mentally healthy are more able to cope with chronic stressors and are, therefore, less likely to experience burnout. Job characteristics that contribute to burnout include workload, time pressure, role conflict, role ambiguity, an absence of resources (especially social support from supervisors and co-workers), and a lack of information, control and autonomy.

Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter (2001) compared the prevalence of burnout for five different occupational sectors in the United States and Holland, and found that teaching was characterized by the highest level of exhaustion, with teachers' cynicism and lack of efficacy being close to population averages. Research by Dorman (2003) with teachers in Queensland found that role overload was a strong predictor of work pressure, which in turn predicted emotional exhaustion. Work pressure, classroom environment and self-esteem accounted for 69% of the variance in teachers' emotional exhaustion, and over 46% of the variance in depersonalization was attributable to school environment, classroom environment, emotional exhaustion and self-esteem. Individual characteristics appear to contribute to burnout, although not to the same degree as situational factors. Individual factors include age, with the level of burnout being higher among younger employees. However, such interpretations must be taken with caution, as people who burn out early and remove themselves from the profession are no longer part of the sample during later years. Small effects have been found for sex (males - more prone to cynicism), marital status (singles - more prone to burnout), and education (higher education equals higher burnout). However, all of these variables are confounded with other variables, such that definitive statements should not be made.

Personality characteristics are another area for investigation, including low hardiness (involvement in daily activities, sense of control, openness to change), external locus of control (attributing events and achievements to other people or to chance), passive, defensive coping styles, low self-esteem, neuroticism (anxiety, hostility, depression, self-consciousness, vulnerability), type A behaviour (competition, time-pressure, hostility and excessive need for control) and 'feeling types' rather than 'thinking types'.

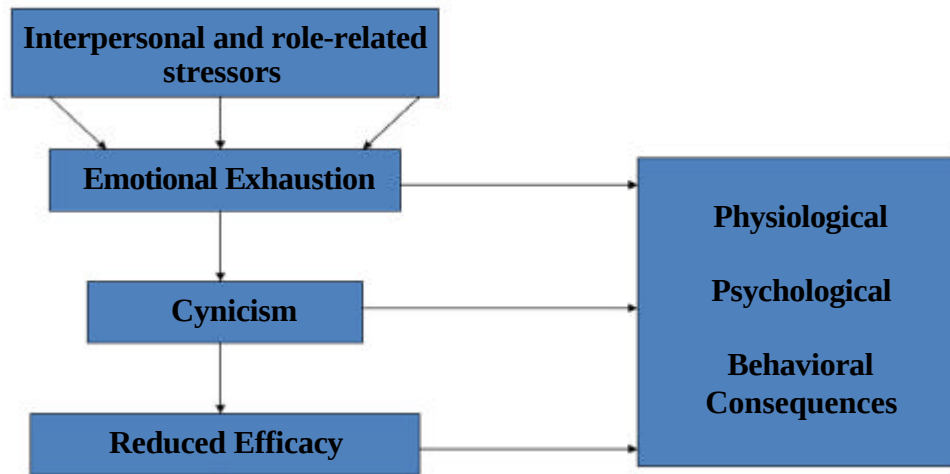
Research by Maslach and Leiter (1997, cited in Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001, p. 413) seeks to integrate the personal and situational dimensions of burnout, in particular, the degree of 'fit' between the person and six domains of the job environment. The enduring relationship, or psychological contract that people have with their job is an important aspect of this research, such as when critical issues are left unresolved, or when the working relationship changes to something that the worker finds unacceptable. The six areas of working life that encompass the central relationships with potential burnout are:

- **Workload** - Excessive overload, wrong kind of work, emotional inconsistency.
- **Control** - Insufficient control over resources, lack of authority, overwhelming responsibility exceeding authority.
- **Reward** - Insufficient financial reward, lack of social recognition, lack of intrinsic reward (such as pride).
- **Community** - Loss of positive connection with others in the workplace (shared praise, comfort, happiness, humour, values), workplace conflict.
- **Fairness** - perceived unfairness (such as pay, cheating, promotions), lack of mutual respect.
- **Values** - Ethics, career aspirations, mission statements and practices.

The authors state that the issue of burnout has prompted many interventions, but relatively little research on effectiveness. In particular, they point to a paradox: those interventions tend to focus on the individual (removal, behaviour change, coping skills, relaxation), whereas the research has found that situational factors play a bigger role (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter).

Future directions include conceptualizing job engagement as the positive foil to burnout, and managing organizational change through the positive development of energy, vigour, involvement, absorption and effectiveness (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001, p. 420).

**The Job Burnout Process:**



Hence, burnout is a state of emotional, mental, and physical exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged stress. It occurs when you feel overwhelmed and unable to meet constant demands. As the stress continues, you begin to lose the interest or motivation that led you to take on a certain role in the first place. Burnout reduces your productivity and saps your energy, leaving you feeling increasingly helpless, hopeless, cynical, and resentful. Eventually, you may feel like you have nothing more to give. Most of us have days when we feel bored, overloaded, or unappreciated; when the dozen balls we keep in the air aren't noticed, let alone rewarded; when dragging ourselves out of bed requires the determination of Hercules. If you feel like this most of the time, however, you may be flirting with burnout.

**You may be on the road to burnout if :**

- Every day is a bad day.
- Caring about your work or home life seems like a total waste of energy.
- You're exhausted all the time.
- The majority of your day is spent on tasks you find either mind-numbingly dull or overwhelming.
- You feel like nothing you do makes a difference or is appreciated.

The negative effects of burnout spill over into every area of life – including your home and social life. Burnout can also cause long-term changes to your body that make you vulnerable to illnesses like colds and flu. Because of its many consequences, it's important to deal with burnout right away.

**SURVEY OF LITERATURE**

Michael (1990) conducted a study. This study reviews the literature on the causes of job burnout, a condition which has been linked with high personnel turnover, friction with co-workers and supervisors, increased dissatisfaction with the job and the organization, job withdrawal, decreased productivity and absenteeism. The paper discusses the communication skills necessary to prevent or reduce burnout from individual and organizational perspectives. The paper places primary emphasis on coping techniques in the following areas: developing interpersonal communication skills, realigning perceptions, empathic listening, distinguishing fact from inference, confronting burnout openly, developing appropriate training programs, and increasing constructive feedback.

**Maslach, et.al** (2001) have studied that burnout is a prolonged response to chronic emotional and interpersonal stressors on the job, and is defined by the three dimensions of exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy. The past 25 years of research have established the complexity of the construct, and places the individual stress experience

within a larger organizational context of people's relation to their work. Recently, the work on burnout has expanded internationally and has led to new conceptual models. The focus on engagement, the positive antithesis of burnout promises to yield new perspectives on interventions to alleviate burnout. The social focus of burnout, the solid research basis concerning the syndrome, and its specific ties to the work domain make a distinct and valuable contribution to people's health and well-being.

The study conducted by Michael (1991) attempts to bring concepts developed in cognitive approaches to stress and coping to a model which predicts burnout as a function of organizational demands and resources. Workers in a mental hospital (N = 177) provided information regarding coping patterns, burnout, and organizational commitment as well as various demands and resources in the work environment. A LISREL analysis confirmed that burnout is best considered a function of coping patterns as well as a function of organizational demands and resources. Control coping cognitions and actions were associated with decreased burnout, while escapist coping strategies were associated with increased burnout. The analysis indicated relationships of coping patterns with organizational commitment could be operating indirectly through the relationships of both coping patterns and commitment with the burnout. The paper discusses implications of these findings for interventions designed to alleviate or prevent burnout.

A before and after study design was employed by Ronald, et.al (2002) to examine the effects of personality and coping training on job burnout. One hundred and one students completed the project. There were no significant differences between before/ after measures of job burnout, thus, coping training did not reduce burnout. The failure of stress coping training to have an effect may be due to one or more of the following: **(a)** poor design of the stress-coping instruction procedure, **(b)** part time employed students generally do not experience high levels of stress, and **(c)**, stress coping training has no effect on how people habitually respond to stress. Additional research is needed to explore these possibilities. The personality measure, core self-evaluation (CSE), indicated a positive predisposition toward burnout and significantly predicted two of the three burnout measures: lower CSE students showed lower professional efficacy and higher cynicism. Results demonstrate that measurable personality attributes are associated with the tendency for people to experience job burnout. This suggests that in order to minimize the likelihood of burnout, a personality assessment procedure should be employed with individuals in stressful positions. Further, research with individuals facing job stress is needed to design potentially more effective stress coping training.

Rioli, et.al (2003) concluded in his study that the moderating effect of individual characteristics on the relation of burnout and environmental work resources was examined. Little work has been done to apply the concept of burnout among information services (IS) professionals (A. S. Huarng, 2001). The current study further investigates resources and their contribution to burnout in the IS field. Personal moderator variables were optimism, pessimism, and coping styles. The predictor variable was an index of work-related resource conditions. The outcome variables were 3 burnout subscales. The relation of work resources to burnout was significantly moderated by personal moderator variables. As predicted by the conservation of resources model (S.E. Hobfoll, 1989), personal factors moderated the impact of work resources typically under conditions in which the resources were low.

**Etzion, et.al** (1986) have done a research. In their study, burnout and coping were investigated among 503 human service professionals in the United States and Israel. A standardized self-report measure was used to determine burnout levels. The frequencies of use of 12 different coping strategies were assessed via a self-report questionnaire, differentiating coping efforts along two dimensions (active/inactive; direct/indirect). A two-way analysis of variance yielded significant main effects for culture and for sex, but no significant interaction. It was found that Americans reported feeling more burned out than Israelis, and women reported feeling more burned out than men. As for coping, women reported using indirect and inactive coping strategies more than men, and Americans reported using them more than Israelis. The pattern of correlation between coping and burnout suggested that active-direct strategies were more effective in coping with stress than were the inactive and/or indirect behaviors. The discussion focuses on how sex role stereotypes and cultural values mediate the availability of various coping strategies, and thus affect the subjective experience of burnout.

## METHODOLOGY

### HYPOTHESES

**H1: Level of experienced job burnout would be significantly high in Men and women (both the employees).**

**H2: There would be a significant difference in burnout feelings among men and women employees.**

### SAMPLE

50 men and 50 women employees responded to the burnout self-test inventory from a multi-national company-R. Stahl Pvt. Ltd, Chennai, India.

### TOOL

**Burnout Self-Test Inventory :** This tool can help employees to check them for burnout. It helps them look at the way they feel about their job and their experiences at work, so that they can get a feel for whether they might be at risk of burnout.

### SCORING

If we choose to use the manual method, then calculate the total of the scores as described in the instructions (note that this uses a slightly different scoring method from the spreadsheet). Apply the score to the scoring table underneath to get the interpretation.

### SCORE INTERPRETATION

| Score   | Comment                                                                               |
|---------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 15 – 18 | Little sign of burnout here.                                                          |
| 19 – 32 | Little sign of a burnout here, unless some factors are particularly severe.           |
| 33 – 49 | Be careful - you may be at risk of burnout, particularly, if several scores are high. |
| 50 – 59 | You may be at severe risk of burnout - do something about this urgently.              |
| 60 - 75 | You may be at very severe risk of burnout - do something about this urgently.         |

## RESULT

**Table-1 : Mean & S.D. On Burnout Self Test Inventory of Two Groups of Employees**

| Employees | N  | M     | S.D.  | Critical Ratio |
|-----------|----|-------|-------|----------------|
| Men       | 50 | 57.10 | 11.90 | 2.56           |
| Women     | 50 | 45.87 | 8.85  |                |

## DISCUSSION

On the basis of scores on burnout self-test inventory, the value of mean and S.D. of men employees are 57.10 and 11.90; whereas, these values for women employees are 45.87 and 8.85 respectively. Results show that both men and women employees scored quite higher mean scores, which indicates that level of job burnout is reported to be remarkably high as per the score interpretation. Mean value for men employees is 57.10, which is pretty high as it comes under the score category of 50-59. This category implies that, “You may be at severe risk of burnout - do something about this urgently”. Likewise, mean value for women employees is 45.87, which is also high as it comes under the score category of 33-49, which is also reported to be high as this category implies that, “Be careful - you may be at a risk of burnout, particularly, if several scores are high”.

This suggests that both men and women employees are experiencing high level of emotional exhaustion or job burnout. Meanwhile, men are reported to experience high level of job burnout as compared to their female counterparts. Critical ratio is also obtained for these scores and is 2.56, which is significant at .01 level of confidence. It apparently shows that the difference found between both the groups is significant and it did not occur due to chance variable. Results indicate that the level of burnout was found to be significantly high in men employees than in the women employees.

## CONCLUSION

Burnout is a prolonged response to chronic emotional and interpersonal stressors on the job, and is defined by the three dimensions of exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy. The past 25 years of research has established the complexity of the construct, and places the individual stress experience within a larger organizational context of people's relation to their work. Recently, the work on burnout has expanded internationally and has led to new conceptual models. The focus on engagement, the positive antithesis of burnout, promises to yield new perspectives on interventions to alleviate burnout. The social focus of burnout the solid research basis concerning the syndrome, and its specific ties to the work domain make a distinct and valuable contribution to people's health and well-being.

## PERSONAL COPING SKILLS AND BURNOUT

- ♦ **Hardiness**- Commitment, Challenge and Control.
- ♦ **Social Support**- From family, friends, colleagues and superior.
- ♦ **Problem solving skills**- Planning actions, evaluating alternatives, seeking social support.
- ♦ **Positive thinking**- Maintaining a positive attitude, imagery, and self-talk.
- ♦ **Palliative measures**- Muscle relaxation, deep breathing, and meditation.

## EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AT THE WORKPLACE

"Emotional intelligence is the ability to manage and use your emotions in positive and constructive ways".

**(Emotional intelligence at the workplace has four major components-)**

- **Self-awareness** – The ability to recognize your emotions and their impact while using burn up feelings to guide your decisions.
- **Self-management** – The ability to control your emotions and behavior and adapt to changing circumstances.
- **Social awareness** – The ability to sense, understand, and react to other's emotions and feel comfortable socially.
- **Relationship management** – The ability to inspire, influence, and connect to others and manage conflict.

## ORGANIZATIONAL COPING STRATEGIES

- ♦ Train new professionals to handle mental and physical stress.
- ♦ Improve physical working conditions.
- ♦ Maintain a fair-minded workplace.
- ♦ Prepare intervention strategies for times of distress or change (such as layoffs, personal trauma among staff, or natural disasters).
- ♦ Build a company culture that values compassion and community as beneficial to productivity and to people.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 1) Christina Maslach, Wilmar B. Schaufeli, and Michael P. Leiter (2001). Job Burnout. *Annual Review of Psychology*. Vol. 52: 397-422.
- 2) Cronin, Michael (1990). Communication Techniques for Individual and Organizational Coping with Job Burnout. paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association (76th, Chicago, IL, November 1-4, 1990).
- 3) Dalia Etzion; Ayala Pines (1986). Sex and Culture in Burnout and Coping among Human Service Professionals. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, Vol. 17, No. 2, 191-209.
- 4) Dorman, J. (2003). 'Testing a model for teacher burnout.' *Australian Journal of Educational and Developmental Psychology*, 3, 35-47.
- 5) Gupta, Anviti (2008). Job Burnout - The Indian Perspective. [www.Indianmba.com](http://www.Indianmba.com).
- 6) Maslach, C., Schaufeli, W. B., & Leiter, M. P. (2001). 'Job burnout.' *Annual Review of Psychology*, 52, 397-422.
- 7) Michael P. Leiter (1991). Coping Patterns as Predictors of Burnout: The Function of Control and Escapist Coping Patterns. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, Vol. 12, No. pp. 123-144.
- 8) Riolli, Laura; Savicki, Victor (2003). Optimism and Coping as Moderators of the Relation Between Work Resources and Burnout in Information Service Workers. *International Journal of Stress Management*. Vol 10(3), 235-252.
- 9) Ronald G. Downey; Leon Rappoport; Scott Hemenover; (2002). Personality and Job Burnout: Can Coping Skills Reduce Job Burnout. Final technical rept. N00014-01-1-0917.