



# Association Between Work - Related Stress and Burnout Among a Group of the Elementary and High School Teachers in Zarrin - Dasht - Fars

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## Abstract

**Background:** Teaching at schools are perceived stressful and a number of teachers in many countries leave school due to stressful conditions. Facing stressful conditions in the long term may cause teachers to experience a burnout. The purpose of this study was to examine the prediction of burnout in primary and secondary teachers based on various stressful conditions at the school workplace, such as personal stressors, professional distress, discipline and motivation, emotional manifestations, behavioral manifestations, as well as physiological fatigue manifestations.

**Methods:** A total of 107 elementary and high school teachers participated in this study. They were recruited from different schools in Zarrin - Dasht - Fars, using convenience sampling. The teachers were chosen from a total of 6 schools. Participants completed the teacher stress inventory (TSI) and Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI). The TSI consists of 49 items measuring stress - related problems. The MBI comprised of 22 and assess 3 dimension including emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and lack of a sense of personal achievement. The mean, standard deviations, frequency, percentage, and multiple regression analysis were used to analyze data using SPSS (version 18).

**Results:** Findings showed that the majority of teachers experienced work - related stress. The highest degree of stress was related to professional distress ( $M = 3.48$ ) followed by personal distress ( $M = 2.92$ ), discipline as well as motivation ( $M = 2.28$ ), job involvement ( $M = 2.22$ ), and time management ( $M = 2.15$ ). Male teachers experienced more occupational stress than female teachers. Those with more years of experience also had a higher level of burnouts. Findings indicated that age, job involvement, emotional manifestation, discipline, and professional distress significantly predicted burnouts among the teachers in the study, while other independent variables such as personal distress and time management did not predict the burnout.

**Conclusions:** This study indicated that a large proportion of the teachers experienced occupational stress. Findings also showed that professional stress or work-related stress was the most important stressors as perceived by the teachers. The findings of this research confirm the significance of teaching related stress as a factor influencing teachers' well - being.

**Keywords:** Stress, Teacher, Burnout, School

## 1. Background

Teaching has been recognized as one of the most stressful professions today caused by many factors and can contribute to high levels of teacher stress (1, 2). Researchers have reported many students' behaviors that lead to the teachers stress, including hostility towards the teacher, inattentive during the class, disruptive, lack of effort in class, coming to class unprepared, hyperactivity, unruliness, damaging school property, hostility toward other students, and no willingness or effort for learning (3). Teachers' perception of stress and their efforts to cope with it can result in a burnout (4). Research has also indicated

that more workplace stress was related to more conflict in teacher - children relationships (5). Additionally, given that, teaching is a stressful profession and can lead to teachers suffering from psychological problems such as depression, anxiety, and burnout (6). Burning out is one of the most common psychological consequences of teaching stress reported by teachers (7). The stress teachers get may cause them to suffer from a burnout (8). Burnout is defined as a condition of emotional exhaustion, which is a reaction to persistent chronic stress, particularly in careers where individuals work with people. A burnout is viewed as a psychological response to interpersonal stress in the workplace and a lack of a sense of accomplishment.

In addition, it involves feelings of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization (9). According to Maslach and his colleagues (1996), burnout has 3 dimensions: emotional exhaustion, personal accomplishment, and depersonalization. Emotional exhaustion refers to the emotional tiredness a person experiences when feeling fatigued and frustrated. Personal accomplishment refers to the person's self-assessment of their own work. The final component, depersonalization refers to the person's preference for isolation from others (10). As a result, stress can have a negative effect on teaching performance, however, there is very little research examining association between teaching professional stress and burnout among school teachers in Iran. Based on previous studies, we selected variables that cover wide ranges of stressful factors related to school teachings. These variables were: personal stressors, professional distress, discipline and motivation, emotional manifestation, behavioral manifestations, and physiological fatigue manifestations. The purpose of this study was to predict burnout in primary and secondary teachers based on various stressful conditions at a school workplace.

**2. Methods**

This correlational study was conducted with 107 elementary and high school teachers from 6 schools. They were recruited from different schools in the city of Zarrin-Dasht, in the Fars province, in 2014, using convenience sampling. The 2nd author visited 2 boys' schools (1 primary school, 1 high school) and 4 girls' schools (1 primary school and 3 high schools) and asked volunteer teachers to take part in this study. About 120 teachers completed the questionnaires at the schools, 13 questionnaires were discarded due to missing items and 107 school teachers remained for the study. The inclusion criteria for participation in this study were: having at least 2 years of teaching experience, not working as a temporary at school, and not having any mental disorders. The Ethical Committee of the Shiraz University approved the research proposal and the informed consent was obtained from the teachers. The mean, standard deviation, frequency, and percentage were used to describe the data. Multiple regression analysis was used to predict a burnout based on the different components of work-related stress. The SPSS software (version 18) was utilized to analyze the data.

The Teacher Stress Inventory (11) was used to assess teachers' stress. This scale is comprised of 49 items measuring 10 stress-related health problems in teachers. The strength of different stressors is measured on a 1 (no strength) to 5 scale (major strength). This inventory measures 6 types of stress: (a) personal stressors, (b) professional distress, (c) discipline and motivation, (d) emo-

tional manifestation, (e) behavioral manifestations, and (f) physiological fatigue manifestations. An alpha coefficient of 0.93 was reported for the TSI (12). This scale has also been used in Iran and researchers have reported a good reliability of 0.91 (13). The Maslach Burnout Inventory Educators Survey (MBI - 10) was used for measuring burnout among the teachers. The MBI contains 22 items designed to assess occupational stress in teaching professionals and include 3 subscales: emotional exhaustion (9 items), depersonalization (5 items), and lack of a sense of personal accomplishment (8 items). Items are scored on a 7-point scale (never - every day). Cronbach's alpha coefficients indicated good internal reliability ranging from 0.90 to 0.96 for the scales (14). Several studies in Iran have found an acceptable reliability for this measure with Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from .84 to .90 for the subscales of the MBI (15). The p value < 0.05 was considered as significant. The independent variables were included into the regression model by the Enter method.

**Table 1.** Demographics Characteristics for Sample

Variables	Number	Percentage (%)
Age (year)	Mean = 41.4	SD = 8.9
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Married	88	82
Single	19	18
<b>Education</b>		
Undergraduate	99	93
Postgraduate	8	7
<b>School Grade</b>		
Primary	51	48
Secondary	58	52

**3. Results**

The mean age of participants was 41.4 (SD = 8.9). The majority of the teachers was female (75%) and married (82%). The average years of teaching experience for the sample was 10.12 (SD = 6.24) years. The majority of the teachers had an undergraduate education (93%) with the remainder having a post graduate education (7%). The demographic characteristics of the participants are displayed in Table 1. The results of this study showed that the highest degree of stress was related to professional stress (M = 3.48) followed by personal distress (M = 2.92), discipline and motivation

( $M = 2.28$ ), job involvement ( $M = 2.28$ ), and time management ( $M = 2.15$ ). The results of descriptive statistics are reported in [Table 2](#).

**Table 2.** Descriptive Statistics of the Dimensions of the Teacher Stress Inventory and the BMI

Variable	Mean	SD
Time management	2.15	0.53
Discipline and motivation	2.28	0.79
Professional distress	3.48	0.68
Personal stress	2.92	0.92
Job involvement	2.22	0.78
Emotional manifestation	2.18	0.64
Burnout	63.80	12.28

Of those surveyed 30% reported job involvement as the 1st stressors. Those aged 50 and above were most likely to be worrying about their work. Male teachers experienced more occupational stress than female teachers. Those with more years of teaching also had a higher level of burnout. Findings showed that age ( $\beta = -0.23, p < 0.014$ ), job involvement ( $\beta = 0.31, p < 0.015$ ), emotional manifestation ( $\beta = 0.28, p < 0.011$ ), discipline ( $\beta = 0.18, p < 0.055$ ), and professional distress ( $\beta = 0.26, p < 0.012$ ) significantly predicted burnout among the teachers in the study, while other independent variables such as personal distress and time management did not predict a burnout. Job involvement was found to be the strongest burnout predictor. The results of regression analysis are reported in [Table 3](#).

#### 4. Discussion

This study indicated that a large proportion of the teachers teaching in primary and high school in Zarrin - Dasht experienced occupational stress. Findings also showed that professional stress or work - related stress was the most important stressors as perceived by the teachers. The findings of this research confirm the significance of teaching related stress as one of the main factors influencing teachers' well - being (16). The findings of this study are in line with those of the other studies indicating higher rate of stress among school teachers. For example, in a survey conducted with primary and secondary teachers, the majority of teachers reported severe levels of work place stress (17). Participants in this study showed a high rate of work stress and burnout, which was higher than that in Maslach et al., and other studies (18). The findings of this study also showed that discipline, emotional

manifestation, and job involvement were associated with burnout. These results are in agreement with other studies conducted at schools showing that work - related stress is associated with burnout. To elaborate, researchers reported a high burnout in primary and secondary teachers following work stress (7). The results of this study were also consistent with Flook and his colleagues study indicating a positive association between work - related stress and burnout (1). An explanation for this finding is that school teachers may have little control over their situations professional environment. For example, school teachers experience much stress during teaching and handling students and classes are usually overcrowded. Furthermore, the low rate of salary for a teaching carrier at schools may lead to burnout. Most teachers in Iran believe that they are not paid enough. In addition, student misbehaviors may contribute to a teachers' burnout (4). Furthermore, teachers at school may have conflict with managers and colleagues. They may also experience the pressure of workload (19). The present study confirms Maslach and Jackson's theory of a burnout (18). This research indicated that age, job involvement, emotional manifestation, discipline, and professional distress significantly predicted a burnout among the participants. These results are in agreement with the previous research. For example, several studies have shown that older teachers experienced less stress than newer teachers. This research has several limitations. One of these is that this was a cross - sectional study in which no inference could be made to the causal direction of the relationships observed between variables. Furthermore, the sample was not a diverse group; thus, future studies should consider more diverse sample and address the effect of different demographic, socio - economic, and psychological factors on burnout. The findings of this study have important implications for designing interventions, which aim to improve teachers' well - being. Providing resources to promote teachers' self - efficacy and ability to manage stress may reduce burnout.

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#### Footnote

**Authors' Contribution:** Olya Nemati collected and analyzed the data. Abdulaziz Aflakseir designed the research plan and wrote the final manuscript.

**Table 3.** Multiple Regression Analysis for Predicting Burnout Among School Teachers

Variable	B	SE	$\beta$	t	P
Age	-4.2	1.48	-0.23	-2.84	0.014
Time management	-0.02	0.09	-0.20	0.62	0.032
Discipline and motivation	0.40	0.20	0.18	1.98	0.055
Professional distress	0.18	0.09	0.26	2.98	0.012
Personal stress	0.10	0.08	0.13	1.15	0.141
Job involvement	1.04	0.29	0.31	3.49	0.015
Emotional manifestation	0.55	0.19	0.28	2.88	0.011

B = unstandardized coefficient;  $\beta$  = standardized coefficient; SE = standard error; t = t value.

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