

# **A Psychological Study on Burnout among Tamil Medium Secondary School Teachers**

**S. Yogarane**

Department of Social Science Education, Faculty of Education

## **Background and Rationale**

In spite of the fact that teaching has already been a high-stress profession (Haberman, 2009), in Sri Lanka, the implementation of secondary level reforms (1999) in the general education system has created a relatively higher stressful working environment, particularly for teachers in the secondary classes. The curricular changes including School Based Assessment, student centered approach, etc., have significantly increased the stress level of the teachers because of the challenges and demands placed on them in fulfilling their duties and responsibilities. Hence teachers are overloaded in their work. Dorman (2003) identified role overload as a potent variable which influences work pressure and subsequently teacher burnout. Therefore, it is imperative to study about the prevalence of burnout among secondary school teachers. In Sri Lanka a few studies have been conducted to examine this particular phenomenon. However, these studies concentrate more on Sinhala medium teachers (De Silva, 2007). Therefore, this study is focusing on Tamil medium teachers with regard to the prevalence of burnout and possible outcomes.

If teachers are working under high levels of stress for significant periods of time they develop burnout characteristics (Blasé, 1986) including depleting energy that leads to emotionally overextended and exhausted (emotional exhaustion), negative, cynical attitude and feelings about students and colleagues (depersonalization), and negative self-evaluation in relation to his or her job performance (diminished personal accomplishment).

The issue of teacher burnout seriously affects the well-being and the performance of teachers and consequently, it becomes a serious issue to school administration as well as the effectiveness of a school. Paradoxically the burned out teachers who stay in the school cause more damages to students than those who leave the school (Haberman, 2009). Hence this study is timely and useful in addressing the issue of teacher burnout.

## **Objectives**

The study was carried out to achieve the following objectives: (a) to assess the level of burnout experienced by the teachers; (b) to determine whether teacher demographics were significant predictors of burnout; and (c) to investigate if the group differences of teacher demographics were significantly related to three burnout dimensions.

## **Methodology**

This study was approached quantitatively using a survey design. One hundred Tamil medium secondary school teachers were selected using a stratified random sampling technique from 260 teachers in five randomly selected schools of Colombo South division in Colombo educational Zone.

A translated version (Tamil) of the Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educators Survey was used to measure the level of teacher burnout. The English version is a 22 item self-report instrument describing the three types of feelings or attitude of burnout namely (dependent variables); Emotional Exhaustion (EE), Depersonalization (DP) and reduced feelings of Personal Accomplishment (PA). The questionnaire consisted of two components. Part one was designed to collect such basic teacher demographics (independent variables) like age, gender, educational qualifications, marital status, teaching experience, client load (student teacher ratio/class size), and the total number of working hours per week. The second part comprised information pertaining to teacher burnout.

Descriptive statistics were used in terms of means and standard deviations to analyze burnout level of the teachers in three burnout sub-scales. Demographic variables were tested using inferential statistics (*t*-test and multiple regression analysis).

### **Outcomes**

The teachers experienced a moderate level of emotional exhaustion with a mean score of 21.10 (SD=10.20), a low level of depersonalization with a mean score of 8.68 (SD=7.94) and a high degree of personal accomplishment with a mean score of 13.77 (SD=9.30). The results also showed that about 39% and 35% of the teachers were reported to assign as 'high' for EE and DP respectively, about 19% and 17% of them were assigned as 'moderate' for EE and DP subscales respectively and the majority of them (97%) were assigned as 'high' for PA subscale.

The results of multiple regression analysis showed that teacher demographics were able to explain about 15.2% of the variance of EE subscale scores and teaching experience and client load contributed significantly to the prediction of EE. However teaching experience seemed to be the most meaningful indicator of the EE dimension at the 0.05 level.

Teacher demographics accounted for about 24% of the variance of DP subscale scores. Client load, total number of working hours, teaching experience and educational qualifications were significant predictors of DP. However, given the small magnitude of the contribution of the latter three, client load seemed to be the most meaningful indicator of DP at the 0.05 level.

Teacher demographics accounted for 30.6% of the variance of PA scores. Teaching experience, total number of working hours and client load contributed significantly to the prediction of PA. However, due to the small extent of the contribution of the latter two, teaching experience appeared to be the most meaningful predictor of PA at the 0.05 level.

The study further showed that the differences were statistically significant with regard to age, teaching experience, total number of working hours per week, client load and civil status to all three dimensions of burnout. However, regarding educational level, the difference was statistically significant for depersonalization and insignificant for other two sub-scales. Likewise, with regard to gender the difference was insignificant for all three dimensions of burnout.

### **Conclusions and Suggestions**

Teachers experienced a moderate level of emotional exhaustion, high level of personal accomplishment and low level of depersonalization. The teaching experience appeared to be the best predictor of emotional exhaustion and personal accomplishment. Client load was found to

be the best predictor of depersonalization. Taking into account the two variables, the differences were significant and negatively correlated with EE and PA dimensions, it can be concluded that more experienced teachers and the teachers who had large class sizes tend to experience less emotional exhaustion and personal accomplishment or vice versa. As the negative correlation between client load and depersonalization indicated teachers who were having crowded classes appear to experience less depersonalization or vice versa. Therefore, it is suggested that a qualitative study be carried out to understand the factors that influence the emotional exhaustion of less experienced teachers and the diminished personal accomplishment of more experienced teachers.

## References

- Blase, J. (1986). A qualitative analysis of sources of teacher stress: Consequences for performance. *American Educational Research Journal*. Vol.23 (1).pp13-40. Retrieved February 27, 2011 from: <http://www.blase.myweb.uga.edu/home/publications.html>
- De Silva, P.V. (2007). Burnout and other occupational health problems of female primary school teachers in the Southern Province of Sri Lanka. Post Graduate Institute of Medicine Colombo.
- Dorman, J. (2003). Testing a Model for Teacher Burnout. *Australian Journal of Educational & Developmental Psychology*. Vol. 3 pp.35-47
- Haberman, M. (2009). Teacher Burnout in Black and White. *The Haberman Educational Foundation*. Retrieved 24<sup>th</sup> February, 2011 from : <http://www.ednews.org/articls/teacher-burnout-in-black-and-white-html>



