Research Paper

Impact of servant leadership on burnout of the employees

Dr. V. Palanisamy[1]*, Mr. R. Sathish Kumar[2]

ABSTRACT

Burnout is the phenomenon that affects different facets of employees' life such as mental and physical health. This study aimed to evaluate the relationship between the servant leadership of a leader and employees' burnout. A sample of 72 employees, consisted of 47 males and 25 females is taken for study using random sampling method. Servant Leadership Survey (SLS) and Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) were used to collect the data form the participants. Mean, Standard Deviation and correlation statistics techniques were used to analyse the collected data. Results obtained showed that relationship among the servant leadership, emotional exhaustion and depersonalization is not significant. But, the relationship between servant leadership and personal accomplishment of the male employees were significant. There was gender difference in the relationship of the servant leadership of leader and workplace burnout.

A leader have a magic stick on his/her hands to make employees happy or sad at workplace. An employee who did something significant in the workplace will be unhappy if he/she is not recognised and rightly rewarded. If it is happened so, then downplaying the work he/she did may affect their dignity. Whether it is unhappiness or lack of dignity, it will affect them in terms of frustration, stress, and burnout. Perceived Leadership style of the leader is associated with the employees' emotional exhaustion (Stordeur, D'Hoore, and Vandenberghe, 2001). If the leader is able to recognise or credit the particular employee, it may make them happy or help to prevent the employee from being frustrated. Likewise, in many aspects leaders' impact on the employees' psychological wellbeing seems to be so important. Leadership style has impact on the employee attitude towards the organization and job satisfaction (Khuwaja, U., Ahmed, K., Abid, G., & Adeel, A., 2020).

Servant leadership is about working for common goal of the team, as well as being genuine and facilitating employees to take responsibility for their work. The leaders who have servant leadership style would prefer to reach the organizations' objective by encouraging fellow employees and they will accept their weakness and seek help from others to complete the work in which they have difficulty. Different leadership styles of the leader would be

[1]Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, Indian Institute of Psychology and Research, Bangalore, India.
[2]Soft Skill Faculty, iNurture Education Solutions Pvt. Ltd., Bangalore, India
*Responding Author

resulting in different mental health outcome among employees. Style of leadership employed by the managers predicts the level of stress on the employee (Gill, Flaschner, & Shachar, 2006; Offermann, & Hellmann, 1996).

Burnout is a syndrome conceptualized as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed. Burnout is the kind of feeling exhausted by work, detachment from one's job, high negativism (WHO, 2018). Fear of future violence in the workplace will increase the employees' burnout (Portoghese, Galletta, Leiter, Cocco, D'Aloja, & Campagna, 2017). Narcissism personality and burnout has a causal relationship (Schwarzkopf, K et al,, 2016). In India, stressors of the employees need to be studied in large scale because the cultural difference, employer and employee relation style is different in India from the western countries. Understanding the factors associated with the employees' mental health would help to provide a better mental health assistance to the employees in India.

India is in process of the economic development as well as 50% of the population are aged below 30, hence, identifying workplace relationship management become vital to utilize the working population in productive manner. Therefore, it is not important that employees are obedient to their leader, employees are mere follower of the leader, and employees are just there to do all assigned work on the time. The organizations should understand that having full control over the employee's way of working will not help the organizations to reach out the objectives but it may prevent the employee to be productive and innovative. If anybody believes that refusing the autonomy of the employee will be an effective method, they should think about developed organizations around the world that gave autonomy to the employees and eventually succeeded in reaching their objectives. If they think that same formula will not work for Indians, they are again wrong because those successful international organizations have employed many Indians.

METHODOLOGY

Objective
- This study intended to assess the impact of servant leadership on employees' level of burnout.

Hypotheses
- There will be a significant relationship between the servant leadership and employees' burn out
- The variation in relationship of servant leadership and employees' burnout will be based on Gender

Sample
A sample of 72 employees working at different kinds of organization have participated in this study. Data were collected via online through Google forms. The total numbers of participants consisted with 25 female and 47 male employees. Simple random sampling method was used to select the participants.

Inclusion Criteria
- Fulltime Employees
- Employees from different sectors

Exclusion Criteria
- Part-time employees
- Entrepreneurs
- Students

Variables

Servant Leadership
- **Empowerment:** Encouraging people and team members to develop their personal accomplishment.
- **Accountability:** It is mechanism that make team member responsible for their work outcome.
- **Standing back:** is giving support to the employees' personal interest as well as providing necessary support and credit.
- **Humility:** The willingness of the leader to acknowledge his/her limitation and actively seeking others contribution in order to overcome those limitations.
- **Authenticity:** is the consistency of leader's thought and behaviour or showing the real self in the workplace.
- **Courage:** is the pro-active behaviour by seeking creative and innovative way to solving problems in the workplace.
- **Interpersonal Acceptance:** Ability to understand others point of view and accepting individual differences.
- **Stewardship:** Working for common goal and willingness to suppress the personal interest
- **Burnout**
- **Emotional Exhaustion:** a feeling of being emotionally overextended and exhausted by one's work.
- **Personal Accomplishment:** is the feeling of competence and achievement in the work
- **Depersonalization:** it is the impersonal response to recipients of one's work
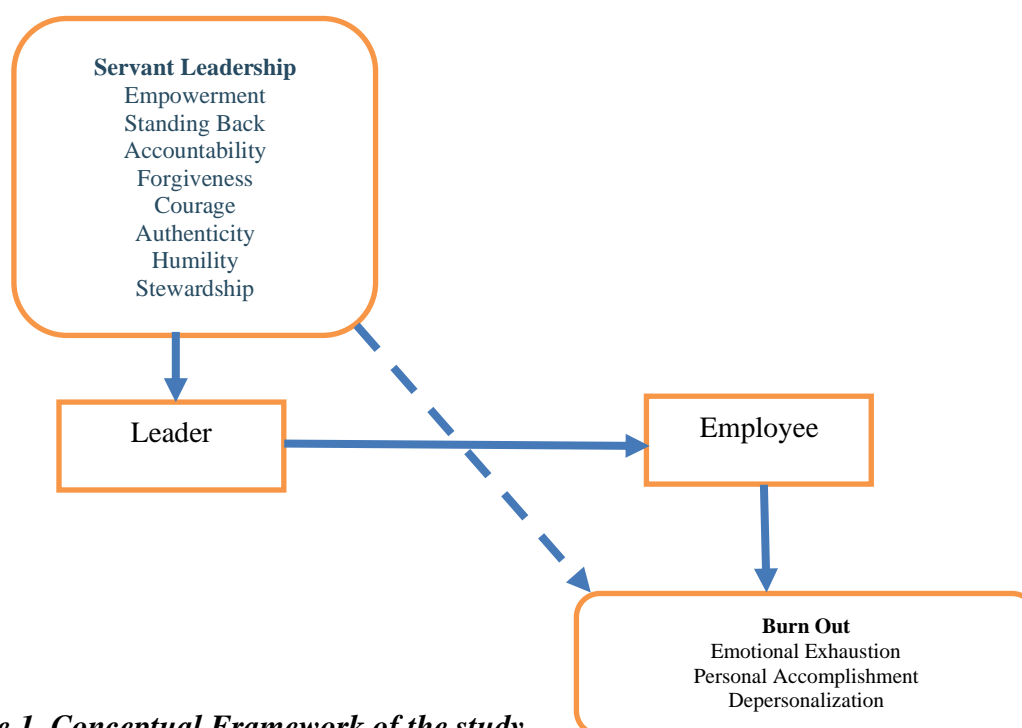

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the study

Tools Used
1. **Servant Leadership Survey (SLS) Dierendonck and Nuijten (2010)** The SLS Consist of 30 items in total and eight sub-dimensions such as Empowerment (7 items), Standing Back (3 items), Accountability (3 items), Forgiveness (3items), Courage (2items), Authenticity (4items), Humility (5items), and Stewardship (3items) with Cronbach's alpha's .94, .93, .92, .95, .76, .91, .90 and .87 respectively. The response ranges from strongly disagree to strongly agree in the 5 point Likert's type Scale.
2. **Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) Maslach and Jackson (1981)** The MBI contains three dimensions such as Emotional Exhaustion (9 items), Personal Accomplishment (8 items), and Depersonalization (5 items). Seven-point Likert's type responses are such as Never, A few times a year or less Once a month, A few times a month, Once a week, A few times a week and Every Day.

Statistics Used
In order to find out the correlation between the variables, statistical techniques adapted were Mean, SD and Pearson Correlation. Computation of the data was completed by using SPSS 20 software.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 1The Mean and S.D of the servant leadership (N=72)

Servant Leadership	Mean	S.D
Empowerment	3.92	.60
Standing Back	3.35	.87
Accountability	3.89	.57
Forgiveness	2.80	.73
Courage	3.34	.83
Authenticity	3.34	.58
Humility	3.55	.62
Stewardship	3.79	.65

Figure 2. Mean of the dimensions of Servant Leadership
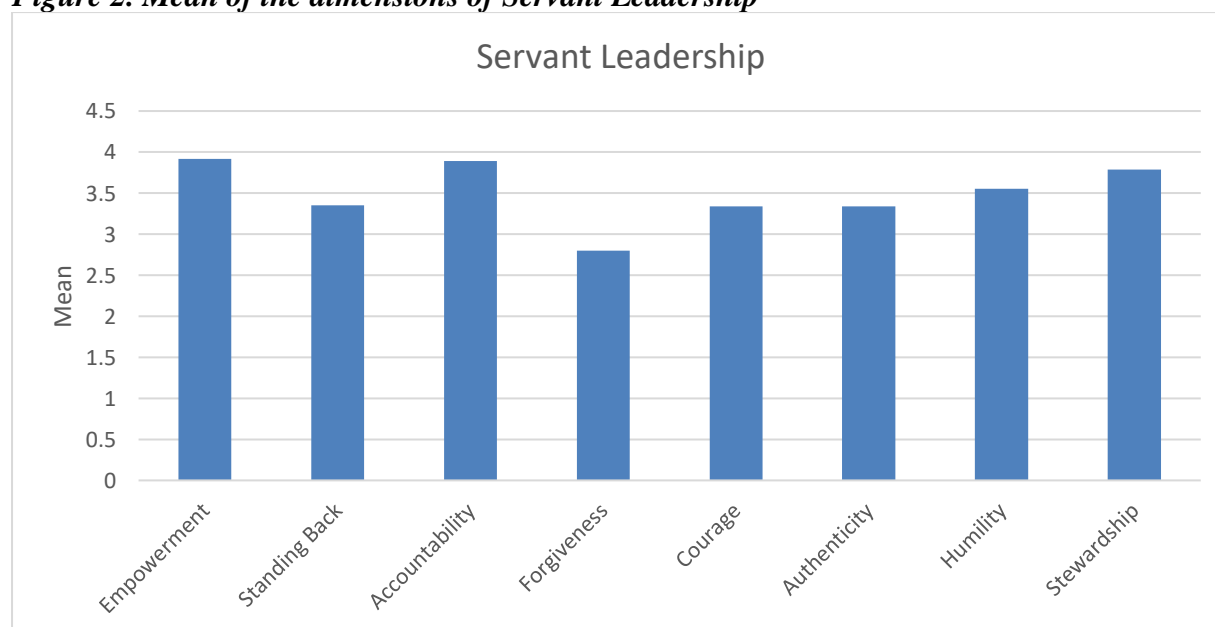
Table 2 The Mean and S.D of the Burnout (N=72)

Burnout	Mean	S.D
Emotional Exhaustion	2.99	1.38
Personal Accomplishment	5.36	1.03
Depersonalization	2.61	1.37

Figure 3. Mean of the dimensions of Burnout

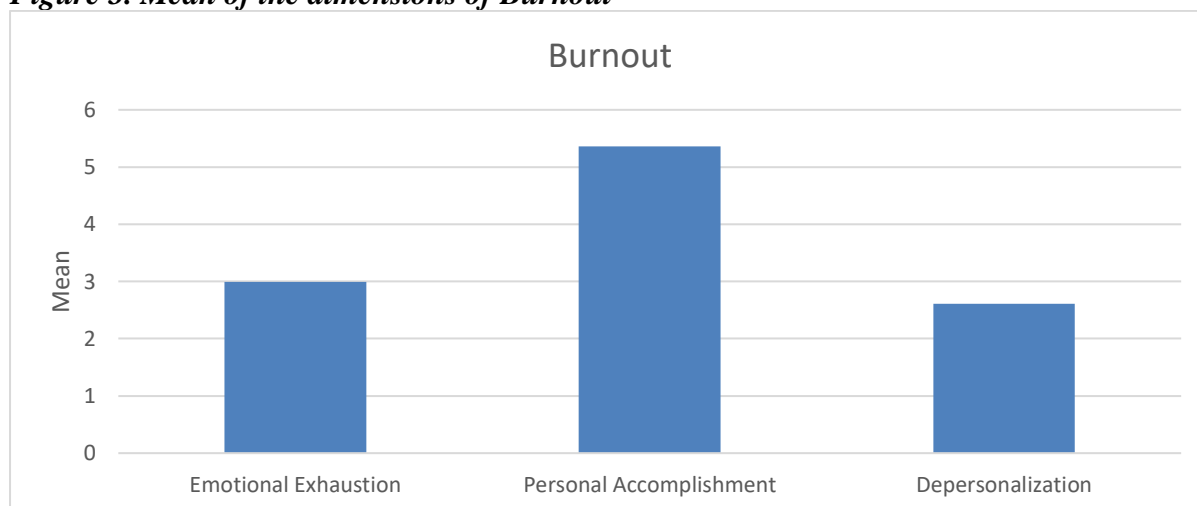*Table 3 The Correlation between the dimensions of servant leadership and dimensions of the Burnout*

Servant Leadership	Burnout		
	Emotional Exhaustion	Personal Accomplishment	Depersonalization
Empowerment	-.098	.47**	.02
Standing Back	-.16	.36**	.13
Accountability	.08	.29*	.21
Forgiveness	-.45**	.10	-.35**
Courage	-.09	.33**	.08
Authenticity	.06	.41**	.29*
Humility	-.01	.31**	.18
Stewardship	-.04	.48**	.10

*Significant at 0.05 level, ** Significant at 0.01 level

Table 1 shows that among eight dimensions of the servant leadership employees perceived that forgiveness was low within their leaders. On the other hand, remaining seven dimensions have got similar mean level.

In the Table 3, Correlation between the servant leadership and burnout was not too high as neither positive nor negative correlation between the variables have not exceeded above .50. However, some significant correlation between the variables has occurred. The servant leadership style of the leader had no effect on the emotional exhaustion of the employee except forgiveness. It indicates that apart from leadership some other factors such personal or environmental may have impact on emotional exhaustion of the employees. In paradox, leaders' practice of forgiveness has impact on employee's emotion. The negative correlation (-.45) between Forgiveness and emotional exhaustion, shows, when leader forgives, it makes employees emotionally comfortable. On the other hand, if the leader is too strict and never forgives employees, it may lead the employee to be emotionally exhausted.

The servant leadership and personal accomplishment of the employees has significant correlation except forgiveness. It shows that the forgiveness only helps the employees to be emotionally stable but will not help them to accomplish anything in work.

In particular, employees' personal accomplishment was highly correlated with empowerment and stewardship is .47 and .48 respectively. If the leader facilitate empowerment then the employees' personal accomplishment may improve because it has obvious connection. When someone empower, he/she can accomplish something. Here, when it comes to stewardship, if the leader is working for the common goodness or common goal or not for self-interest then alone the employee's personal accomplishment would improve.

The result shows that if the leader is authentic, showing consistency between his/her thinking and behaviour, it will have positive impact on the employees' level of personal accomplishment. On the other hand, if the employee believes that leader supports his/her initiatives then it also may contribute to accomplish something but co-efficient of the correlation between standing back and personal accomplishment was low. Making employees accountable for their work is significantly correlated with the personal accomplishment but still it is the lowest when compared to the other dimensions. Further, when individual thinks that their leader is courageous, it gives them some motivation to accomplish something but as result shows correlation was not that much high when compared to the other dimensions such as empowerment, authenticity, and stewardship. The humility of the leader may also improve the personal accomplishment of the employee, so that leaders should admit their weakness and should also ask others to help on things in which they require real support. These kind of leadership characteristics help employees to accomplish something in their work. Many successful organizations try to maintain genuineness and transparency at workplace because they believed as well as witnessed that when people got comfortable environment and friendly leader, they start experimenting with their work and come up with creative ideas and innovations. As the result indicates, the servant leadership mostly help employees to accomplish their personal goals in the workplace.

Depersonalization of the employee is negatively correlated with the forgiveness of the leader and it indicates that when the leader has forgiveness characteristic, it may reduce the depersonalization of the employee in the job. However, the remaining dimensions of the servant leadership has no correlation with depersonalization. Therefore, behaviour of the leader may not determine the employees' level of involvement or personalization of people such as customers or students. Other factors may have an effect on the depersonalization of the employee. In particular, employees' attitudes such as job involvement, job satisfaction, and job commitment may have impact on depersonalization. Further, job stress, role conflict, role ambiguity might have caused the employee to develop depersonalization. However, relationship between these factors on employees' burnout may be studied further.

Table 4 The Mean and S.D of the servant leadership in gender wise (N = 72)

	Male (n =47)		Female (n=25)	
	Mean	**S.D**	**Mean**	**S.D**
Empowerment	3.91	.68	3.93	.43
Standing Back	3.43	.87	3.18	.87
Accountability	3.95	.62	3.80	.46
Forgiveness	2.86	.74	2.69	.73
Courage	3.38	.91	3.26	.67
Authenticity	3.45	.61	3.14	.46
Humility	3.60	.65	3.44	.55
Stewardship	3.76	.65	3.85	.65

Figure 4. Gender difference in Mean of dimensions of Servant Leadership
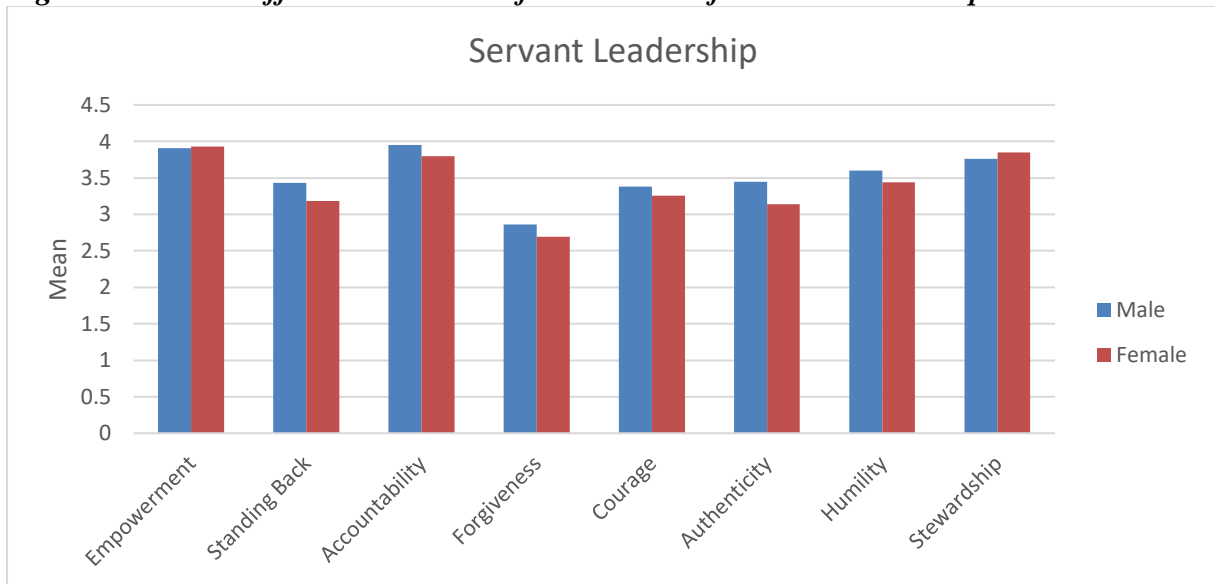
Table 5 Gender difference in Mean and SD of the burnout

	Male (n =47)		Female (n=25)	
	Mean	**S.D**	**Mean**	**S.D**
Emotional exhaustion	2.79	1.52	3.37	.97
Personal accomplishment	5.42	1.07	5.26	.98
depersonalization	2.79	1.53	2.28	.94

Figure 5. Gender difference in the mean of the Burnout
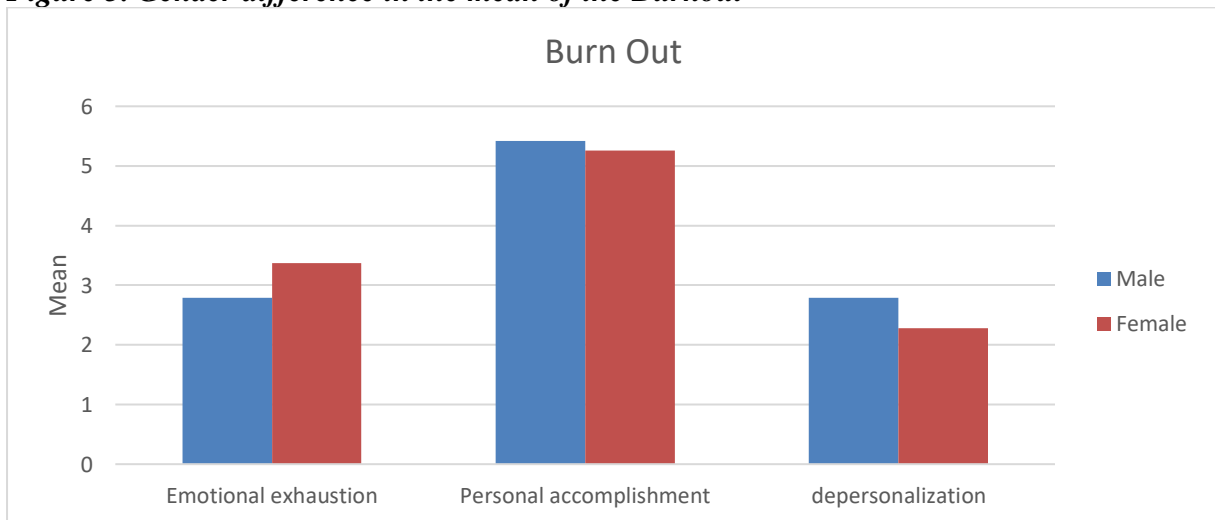

Table 6 Gender difference in correlation of Servant Leadership and Burnout

	Emotional Exhaustion		Personal Accomplishment		Depersonalization	
	Male	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**
Empowerment	-.06	-.26	.49**	.46*	.09	-.29
Standing Back	-.12	-.22	.39**	.29	.13	.05
Accountability	.17	-.14	.36*	.08	.28	-.18
Forgiveness	-.49**	-.28	.15	-.02	-.46**	-.16
Courage	-.05	-.20	.31*	.36	.10	-.04

	Emotional Exhaustion		Personal Accomplishment		Depersonalization	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Authenticity	.16	-.06	.43**	.36	.33*	-.02
Humility	.07	-.22	.35*	.19	.25	-.13
Stewardship	.03	-.36	.47**	.53**	.25	-.26

*Significant at 0.05 level, ** Significant at 0.01 level*

Table 4 shows that mean of the both male and female look almost similar. Notably, both genders have perceived that leaders have low forgiveness than the other characteristics of the servant leadership. Further, forgiveness of the leader only helped the male employees to manage their emotional exhaustion than female employees. As table 6 shows that forgiveness of the leader does not helped the female employee to deal with their emotional exhaustion. Geller, and Hobfoll, (1994) found that men are getting more support from their family than the women. Since, women get less emotional support from their family and society they experience more emotional exhaustion than men. Therefore, leader's behaviour, such as forgiveness had not had impact on female employees since the way they experience emotional exhaustion is differed from men. Further, in Indian culture women are mostly responsible for household work that is other stressors. Women are widely facing domestic violence than men, in fact, in some culture men are believed that they have the right to control women (Dutton, 2006). This scenario indicates that women need extra assistance than the men to cope up their emotional difficulties.

The empowerment was significantly correlated with the personal accomplishment of both male and female employees. The standing back factor is positively correlated with the personal accomplishment for the male employees only. Support from the leader to the employee by standing back for their new initiative have not helped the female employee to improve their personal accomplishment. Likewise, accountability, courage, authenticity, humility of the leader has helped the male employee to improve the personal accomplishment but it is not same for the female employees since the results show that these characteristics of leader was not helping female employee to accomplish something in the work. The correlation between the stewardship and the personal accomplishment was high for both men and women. The results show that when the leader work for common goal rather than his personal accomplishment it would help the employees to accomplish their personal goals regardless of the gender difference.

The correlation between the servant leadership and depersonalization of the employee was not connected with the different dimensions of the servant leadership expect forgiveness for male employees. Results shows that male employees' level of depersonalization reduces if the leader forgives. Results further shows that female depersonalization of the people does not depend on the leader's behaviour. Some previous researches have also found gender direness in burnout. According to the Salmela-Aro and Read (2017) women students experience more educational burnout than men students.

Leaders' support and appreciation will improve the well-being of the employee and even prevent their ill health (Vaananen A et al., 2003). Social support, like getting help from the fellow employee would reduce the stress and burnout (Van der Doef & Maes, 1999). Social support, relationship with one's supervisor, autonomy, and constructive feedback would help employees to feel better in the workplace. Bakker, Demerouti and Euwema, (2005) found that high job demand and lack of job resource may lead to burnout among the

employees. The study suggested organizations to think before assigning jobs to the employees, does this job will not be done at the cost of employees' health. The above researches showed that various factors are determining employee burnout, particularly the job demand and job resource gap, thus leadership style is not significant contributing factor for burnout. Leader may not cause burnout even though he/she is not having servant leadership style but leader can help employees to overcome their stress. Low servant leadership may not cause burnout but high servant leadership style may help employees to overcome their burnout. As results shows emotional exhaustion and depersonalization of the job of the employees are not much related to their leaders' behaviour or style.

CONCLUSIONS

The study provided insights on burnout of employees as findings show that servant leadership is not determining the employees' emotional difficulties and depersonalization of the job. However, servant leadership helps male employees for their personal accomplishments in workplace. In particular, servant leadership is not connected with the female employee's burnout including their personal accomplishment. Different set of factors may determine the male and female employees' level of burnout in the workplace. Servant leadership may help in coping up with burnout but there might be the gender deference.

Implications

- Organizations may train their leaders and mangers to develop supportive environment in their sections or departments.
- Servant leadership practice may improve the male employees' personal accomplishment in the workplace.
- Organizations may avoid punishment methods and should forgive the mistakes of the employees since it has lead them to emotional exhaustion.

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