

## Burnout, Cognitive Emotion Regulation & Coping among College Students & Working Professionals

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### ABSTRACT

Any kind of work, be it academic or professional, requires ample amount of effort and time. This effort and time also involve an interplay of various emotions, like stress, exhaustion, etc. If not dealt with effectively, this amalgam of negative emotions may eventually lead to burnout. Burnout is a psychological syndrome caused due to constant subjection to stress and excessive workload, and leads to people to lose interest, feel unable to fulfil responsibilities and doubt their ability to accomplish goals. Individuals often employ various strategies to manage the emotions associated with burnout. These are known as coping and emotion regulation strategies. Coping strategies are those that help one manage negative emotions such as stress, whereas emotion regulation strategies are those that help manage an excess of emotions, not just negative ones. Therefore, the study aims to explore the relationship between burnout, cognitive emotion regulation and coping in a sample of 100 individuals (50 college students & 50 working professionals). Standardised tests were administered. Results found a significant relationship between burnout, coping and cognitive emotion regulation. No significant differences were found between college students & working professionals. The study therefore implies that educational institutions and organisations must provide opportunities for the stakeholders to help use adaptive coping strategies in dealing with burnout.

**Keywords:** *Cognitive Emotion Regulation, Burnout, Coping, Students, Working Professionals*

Most of the youth today is either studying in college or working to sustain themselves. These though might be exciting experiences, they also tend to be strenuous, and can cause exhaustion. Being a student comes with its own set of responsibilities like performing well in academics as well as navigating through various career options in the form of internships. Working professionals on the other hand must work to sustain themselves, and constantly upskill and update their knowledge to grow in their career. Such immense hard work is often accompanied by a range of emotions, and people often employ a variety of coping and emotional regulation strategies to deal with them.

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Going to college is a period of dynamic personality development, when adolescents get ready for adulthood, acquiring more autonomy and decision-making capacity (Arnett, 2000). College students discover new found independence; the college environment enables them to practice self-governance, individuation from parents, and freedom to direct their own lifestyle in a safe environment that delays many adult responsibilities. As a result, they have the opportunity to extend exploration of the self, develop new ideas, take advantage of multiple opportunities, and try out various lifestyles (Zarrett & Eccles, 2006). They also learn to manage their time, energy, and finances. Eventually, once they are done with their education, they go onto pursue a job, or set up their own enterprises to sustain themselves or to pursue their dreams. This marks the transition from emerging adulthood to early adulthood. Three criteria indicate the transition from emerging adulthood to early adulthood, accepting the responsibility for oneself, making independent decisions, and becoming financially independent. This transition, however, can be frustrating and challenging, as individuals struggle to identify their own competencies, work that doesn't suit their needs and lack both discipline-specific and generic competencies (Nielsen & Holmgaard, 2016).

Both students and working professionals have their own set of difficulties that they deal with. Students on one hand deal with academic overloads, course, inadequate time to study, workload every semester, exams, low motivation, and high family expectations which eventually lead to academic stress and exhaustion (Batineh, 2013). Similarly, poor job satisfaction, lack of social support, excessive workload and poor work conditions are some of the factors causing occupational stress and burnout in working professionals (Sveinsdóttir et al., 2006).

### ***Burnout***

Maslach & Leiter (1997) defined burnout as “the index of the dislocation between what people are and what they must do. It represents erosion in values, dignity, spirit and will, an erosion of the human soul. It is a malady that spreads gradually and continually over time, putting people into a downward spiral from which it is hard to recover”. Burnout is an occupational hazard which has been described as physical and emotional exhaustion resulting from excessive demands on energy, strength, or resources (Freudenberger, 1977). Burnout comprises three components: emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and reduced personal accomplishment. Emotional exhaustion is the state of feeling emotionally worn out and drained as a result of accumulated work stress. Depersonalisation refers to the feeling of detachment from the work. Reduced personal accomplishment refers to feelings of incompetence and a lack of achievement and productivity in work.

Burnout can manifest in any profession, including college students. In students, it is often manifested in the form of academic burnout. A study conducted by Vizoso et al. (2019) on 532 Spanish undergraduate students found that academic burnout was directly and positive associated with maladaptive coping. Similarly, research has shown that teachers, entrepreneurs, doctors, etc. do eventually burnout due to the various pressures that they have to handle on the job (Shukla & Trivedi, 2008; Kumar, 2016; Schnaitter, 2018). These pressures can be classified into six factors: workload, control, reward, community, fairness, and values. Thereby, affecting the recipients of their services as well (Madigan & Kim, 2020).

The Job Demands-Resources model implies that there exists an imbalance between employee demands and the resources that one has available to deal with those demands which results in a strain in the individuals. This model, though initially designed for the

working population, can be implied for the student population as well, i.e., time balance demands and professor support are both crucial for students as they influence strain and burnout (Barr et al., 2015).

### ***Cognitive Emotional Regulation***

Cognitive Emotion Regulation is the “conscious, mental strategies individuals use to cope with the intake of emotionally arousing information” (Garnefski, et al., 2007). According to Thompson (1994) “Emotion regulation consist of the extrinsic and intrinsic processes responsible for monitoring, evaluating and modifying emotional reactions especially their intensive and temporal features to accomplish one goals.” A subset of these emotion regulation processes includes conscious cognitive regulation processes. Cognitions are influenced by emotions and also influences on emotions (Shahba et al., 2017).

Cognitive emotion regulation is associated with management and control of emotions during or after a stressful and threatening or positive event occurs (Garnefski, 2001).

Research investigating the relationship between cognitive emotion regulation and stress among 127 employees found that cognitive emotion regulation by shaping work related and non-work-related social supports affects one’s job stress (Capar, 2015). A study by Zlomke & Hahn (2010) conducted on a sample of 1080 young adults examined the differential use of cognitive emotion regulation strategies between males and females and found that there is a difference in the cognitive emotional strategies used by males and females. Cognitive emotion regulation comprises of four maladaptive strategies, i.e., rumination, self-blame, blaming of others and catastrophising. It also comprises of five adaptive strategies, i.e., positive refocusing, refocusing on planning, acceptance, putting into perspective and positive reappraisal.

### ***Coping***

Coping is defined as “cognitive and behavioural efforts to master, reduce, or tolerate the internal and/or external demands that are created by the stressful transaction” (Folkman, 1984). It is also defined as the strategies used to manage a negative or a stressful event or an academic failure (Metz & Subasi, 2020). The process of coping fulfils two functions; emotional regulation and managing the problem that causes the situation which gives rise to the emotions (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). There are several types of coping, namely, emotion-focused coping, problem-focused coping, appraisal-focused coping and avoidant coping. These coping techniques can be broadly grouped as adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies.

A study by Hascher (2010) found that those students who use emotion-focused coping strategies end up focusing on regulating their emotions, rather than emphasising on resolving the problem that causes the stress. Thereby implying that emotion-focused coping strategy is a maladaptive coping strategy. Emotion-focused coping is the first and most commonly used reacting to stress among freshman college students (Hill, 2014). Problem focused coping strategies, on the other hand, include taking control of the problem and focusing on removing oneself from the problem situation (Carroll, 2013). A study by Chai et al. (2012) found that Asian students were more likely to use religious coping strategies than European students and that religious coping was beneficial irrespective of the stress levels.

**Purpose**

The purpose is to study the relationship between of burnout, cognitive emotion regulation and coping among students and working professionals.

**Hypothesis**

- There will be a relationship between burnout and cognitive emotion regulation.
- There will be a relationship between cognitive emotion regulation and coping.
- There will be a relationship between burnout and coping.
- There will be a difference in cognitive emotion regulation, burnout & coping strategies among college students & working professions

**METHOD**

**Sample**

A total of 100 people participated from across Hyderabad, Telangana in the study of which 50 were students and 50 were working professionals, wherein, college students aged between 18 and 25 years and working professionals aged between 20 and 35 years.

**Measures**

- **Oldenburg Burnout Inventory:** developed by Demerouti et al. (2003) to measure job and academic burnout. It is a 16-item scale and is rated on a four-point scale ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree”.
- **Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (short):** developed by Garnefski & Kraaij (2006) to identify the strategies one uses to regulate emotional responses to events causing individual emotional aggravation. It is an 18-item scale and is rated on a five-point scale to which extent; (almost) never' (1), 'sometimes' (2), 'regularly' (3), 'often' (4), or '(almost) always' (5) – they make use of certain emotional regulation strategies.
- **Coping Scale:** Is a 13-item scale developed by Hamby, Grych & Banyard (2013). It is rated on a four-point Likert scale ranging from “mostly true about me” to “not true about me” and is used to examine behavioural, emotional, and cognitive methods of dealing with concerns.

**Procedure**

The participants were informed about the purpose of the research and the questionnaires were filled through Sirway me, a research data collection service and each participant was thanked for their cooperation. Standardised psychological tests were administered to the participants.

**RESULTS**

**Table 1: N, Mean and Standard Deviation**

	Oldenburg Burnout Scale			Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire									Coping
	Disengagement	Exhaustion	Total	Self-Blame	Acceptance	Rumination	Positive Refocusing	Refocus on planning	Positive Reappraisal	Putting into Perspective	Catastrophising	Other-Blame	
N	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Mean	18.3	19.4	37.7	5.63	6.62	6.36	5.45	7.19	7.44	6.26	5.66	4.25	34.1
SD	3.09	3.03	5.38	1.94	2.39	1.89	1.87	1.82	1.92	1.87	2.4	1.71	5.58

**Table 2: Correlation of all variables**

	Disengagement	Exhaustion	Burnout	Self-Blame	Acceptance	Rumination	Positive Refocusing	Refocus on planning	Positive Reappraisal	Putting into Perspective	Catastrophising	Other-Blame	Coping
Disengagement	—												
Exhaustion	0.545***	—											
Burnout	0.882***	0.876***	—										
Self-Blame	-0.028	0.003	-0.015	—									
Acceptance	-0.154	-0.057	-0.12	0.26**	—								
Rumination	-0.11	0.008	-0.059	0.353***	0.37***	—							
Positive Refocusing	-0.038	-0.048	-0.049	0.116	0.086	0.048	—						
Refocus on planning	0.039	0.039	0.045	0.284**	0.321**	0.405***	0.328***	—					
Positive Reappraisal	-0.163	-0.02	-0.105	0.194	0.253*	0.292**	0.11	0.514***	—				
Putting into Perspective	-0.142	0.019	-0.071	0.194	0.122	0.187	0.168	0.205*	0.339***	—			
Catastrophising	0.067	0.3**	0.208*	0.086	0.206*	0.21*	0.116	0.298**	0.09	0.182	—		
Other-Blame	-0.031	0.135	0.058	-0.173	0.056	-0.016	0.17	0.001	-0.139	0.248*	0.431***	—	
Coping	-0.206*	-0.044	-0.143	0.152	0.173	0.319**	0.274**	0.396***	0.333***	0.342***	0.2*	0.063	—

Note. \* p < .05, \*\* p < .01, \*\*\* p < .001

**Table 3: T-Statistics of Groups**

	Group	N	Mean	SD	T-Statistic
Disengagement	Student	50	18.66	2.85	0.288
	Working Professional	50	18.00	3.31	
Exhaustion	Student	50	19.64	2.59	0.43
	Working Professional	50	19.16	3.42	
Burnout	Student	50	38.30	4.73	0.291
	Working Professional	50	37.16	5.94	
Self-Blame	Student	50	5.68	1.93	0.798
	Working Professional	50	5.58	1.96	
Acceptance	Student	50	6.96	2.43	0.156
	Working Professional	50	6.28	2.32	
Rumination	Student	50	6.46	1.96	0.6
	Working Professional	50	6.26	1.84	
Positive Refocusing	Student	50	5.72	1.97	0.15
	Working Professional	50	5.18	1.75	
Refocus on planning	Student	50	7.22	2.01	0.87
	Working Professional	50	7.16	1.62	
Positive Reappraisal	Student	50	7.50	2.04	0.756
	Working Professional	50	7.38	1.81	
Putting into Perspective	Student	50	6.20	1.98	0.75
	Working Professional	50	6.32	1.78	
Catastrophising	Student	50	5.12	2.29	0.023
	Working Professional	50	6.20	2.40	
Other-Blame	Student	50	4.02	1.61	0.179
	Working Professional	50	4.48	1.79	
Coping	Student	50	35.00	5.92	0.119
	Working Professional	50	33.26	5.12	

## **DISCUSSION OF RESULTS**

The results showed that Disengagement is significantly negatively correlated with Coping ( $r = -0.206$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). Further, Exhaustion ( $r = 0.3$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ) and Burnout ( $r = 0.208$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ) are both positively correlated with Catastrophising subscale of the Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire. Similarly, Rumination ( $r = 0.319$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ), Positive Refocusing ( $r = 0.274$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ), Refocus on Planning ( $r = 0.396$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ), Positive Reappraisal ( $r = 0.333$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ) and Catastrophising ( $r = 0.2$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ) subscales of the Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire are positively correlated with Coping. The results also showed no significant difference between college students and working professionals in burnout, cognitive emotion regulation and coping.

A study by Vinter (2021) found that catastrophising, rumination and positive reappraisal played a role in determining the levels of burnout in students. Research (Sadiq et al., 2022) has shown that positive reappraisal as a coping strategy helps alleviate burnout in nursing students. Lastly, adaptive coping strategy use such as positive reappraisal and refocus on planning was found to lower emotional exhaustion and increase a sense of personal accomplishment (Potard & Landais, 2021).

## **CONCLUSION**

Although the study was conducted meticulously, there were some limitations to this study. Since the study was quantitative in nature, participants' subjective experience with burnout and coping. The sample was also not evenly distributed across different courses and professions. Despite the limitations, the findings of the present study were supported by research and there are some recommendations that can be put forward. Present results hold implications for the advancement of further research. A comparative analysis can be done taking into consideration students who are working part-time and the psychological effects it has had on them. Upcoming research can also use mixed method experimental designs with unexplored variables for extensive outcomes. The present study provided helpful results, and interventions must be designed to suit individuals' requirements to cope with burnout. Individuals must be encouraged and taught cognitive emotion regulation strategies like positive reappraisal, rumination. Educational institutions and other professional organisations must prioritise work-life balance and conduct wellness programs to enhance well-being thereby effectively coping with burnout.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

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