The International Journal of Indian Psychology
ISSN 2348-5396 (Online) | ISSN: 2349-3429 (Print)
Volume 12, Issue 3, July- September, 2024
DIP: 18.01.010.20241203, DOI: 10.25215/1203.010
https://www.ijip.in

Comparative Study

Examining Gender Differences in Burnout Levels Among Human Service Professionals: A Comparative Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This research paper explores the intricate dimensions of burnout within human services professions, focusing on the psychological toll experienced by individuals dedicated to aiding others. Emphasizing the application of Maslach's Burnout Inventory as a primary assessment tool, the study investigates emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment as key facets of burnout in human services. The total sample consisted of 60 samples. The Maslach's Burnout Inventory by Christina Maslach and Susan E Jackson was administered to the subjects. The conclusion of this study was that there is no significant gender difference among human service professionals for burnout.

Keywords: *Burnout, Stress, Maslach's Burnout Inventory, Gender*

In the dynamic milieu of human service professionals, the pivotal variables of stress and burnout exert significant influence on the professionals' wellbeing, thereby affecting the quality of care afforded to recipients. Given the recurrent exposure to emotionally taxing circumstances that are inherent in these professions, there arises a compelling need to understand the nuanced interplay between gender dynamics and the manifestation of a burnout. The fundamental attributes of work for human service professionals frequently involve emotionally charged interactions with those under their care. These contacts are regarded as critical factors influencing the onset of burnout (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993; Jackson, Schwab, & Schuler, 1986; Van Dierendonck, Schaufeli, & Buunk, 2001).

Stress

According to the WHO (World Health Organization), stress can be defined as a state of worry or mental tension caused by a difficult situation ("Stress," 2023). The APA (American Psychological Association) declared that stress has a direct impact on psychology and physiology, influencing mental and physical health and diminishing overall quality of life ("Stress," n.d.). A 2006 study by The Health Centre identified four primary types of stress experienced by adults (*What Types of Stress Are There?*, n.d.)

Eustress - It is a positive form of short-term stress that can provide a temporary boost of strength and focus. It arises in situations that demand increased physical exertion, heighten

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Received: July 01, 2024; Revision Received: July 12, 2024; Accepted: July 15, 2024

enthusiasm or stimulate creative thinking. For example, holidaying, watching a movie, receiving a promotion at a job etc. (*Observation on Student/Trainee's Under Stress Reaction*, n.d.).

Distress - This is the negative side of stress, characterized by feelings of discomfort and a sense of being overwhelmed. It often stems from constant adjustments or disruptions to our routines. For example, if a person relocates frequently, the repeated upheaval can cause distress. Distress is further categorized into *acute* and *chronic* stress. Acute stress is short-lived and intense stress response. It's like a sudden burst of energy that helps us deal with immediate threats, disappearing once the situation is resolved. For example, children's problems at school, mobile phone not working etc. Chronic stress is a prolonged state of tension that persists for extended periods. This kind of stress is detrimental to physical and mental health. For example, injury or illness, death of a spouse, sleep problems etc. (Shafir, 2023) (*Types of Stressors (Eustress Vs. Distress)*, n.d.).

Hyperstress - It occurs when an individual experiences excessive pressure that surpasses their ability to cope. This can arise from work overload, demanding situations or feeling constantly overwhelmed. When in a state of hyperstress, even minor events can trigger strong emotional reactions, such as irritability or anxiety. The consequences of hyperstress can be significant and long-lasting.

Hypostress - The opposite of hyperstress, arises from a lack of challenge or stimulation. Individuals experiencing hypostress can often feel restless, uninspired and bored. For example, a factory worker or a daily wage worker performing repetitive tasks day in and day out. This monotonous routine could lead to hypostress. While short-term hypostress might not seem detrimental, its long term effects can be significant. It can chip away at a person's motivation and performance, ultimately impacting their overall health and well-being (*Chapter 8 Managing Stress and Wellness*, 2011).

Hans Selye stress model

Selye's proposition posited the constant presence of stress in an individual during the entire exposure to a nonspecific demand. He differentiated acute stress from the comprehensive response to chronically applied stressors, labeling the latter as 'general adaptation syndrome', which is also known in the literature as Selye's Syndrome. This syndrome divides the total response from stress into three phases: the alarm reaction, the stage of resistance and the stage of exhaustion. When individuals are exposed to a stressor, they are at first taken off guard, then attempt to maintain homeostasis by resisting the change and eventually fall victim to exhaustion in countering the stressor (Tan & Yip, 2018).

Our brains thrive on a specific kind of pressure to function at their best. This principle is understood in the Yerkes-Dodson law, which suggests a correlation between stress and performance. For example, a pot of water needs the right amount of fire to get heated, too little and the water won't boil, too much and it boils over. The Yerkes-Dodson law suggests a similar concept - a moderate level of stress, like an approaching deadline, can act as the perfect motivator, fueling our focus and driving us to complete tasks efficiently. This explains the phenomenon of cramming - the pressure of a deadline can trigger a burst of productivity. Chronic stress triggers a cascade of negative consequences. The initial surge of hormones meant to enhance alertness becomes a constant strain, leading to emotional exhaustion. Tasks that were once stimulating become overwhelming burdens, and a sense of

depersonalization sets in – we become detached from our work and lose the sense of purpose that once fueled our efforts. The key difference between stress and burnout is the duration and intensity. Stress is a temporary response to a perceived threat, but burnout is overwhelming stress (Skurat, 2023) (McDonald, 2023).

Burnout

Maslach's definition of burnout is the most popular in psychology. It is defined as a psychological syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who work with other people in some capacity (Galán, Sanmartín, Polo, & Giner, 2011a; Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 2015). It can also be defined as a syndrome of psychological problems experienced as a result of chronic work stress (Milfont, Denny, Ameratunga, Robinson, & Merry, 2008).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Soares P, Lopes H, Mendonca D, Vieira Silva D, Martins Rodrigues F and de Castro J (2023) published "Use of the Maslach Burnout Inventory Among Public Health Care Professionals: Scoping Review". The authors reviewed 55 articles with the intention to map the utilization of Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) to identify burnout syndrome in health professionals. The review summarized that burnout syndrome is an occupational illness and divergences can be observed as a result of cross cultural adaptations and applications (Soares et al., 2023).

Vukmirovic M, Rajovic N, Pavlovic V, Masic S, Mirkovic M, Tasic R, Randjelovic S, Mostic D, Velickovic I, Nestorovic E, Milcanovic P, Stanisavljevic D and Milic N (2020) studied "The Burnout syndrome in medical academia: Psychometric properties of the Serbian version of the Maslach burnout inventory – educators survey". It was administered on 246 medical faculty. Burnout syndrome was identified as a common problem in medical academia and was correlated to personality traits and its effect on the intention to career change and work abroad. The study was concluded with an exhaustive list of solutions and recommendations (Vukmirovic et al., 2020).

Guler Yavuz and Nuri Dogan (2014) conducted a study on "Maslach Burnout Inventory – Student Survey (MBI-SS): A Validity Study". Data was obtained from 1020 high school students from 9^{th} to 12^{th} grade students. The validity of MBI was compared using Velicers MAP test, Horn's Parallel Analysis and Confirmatory and Explanatory factor analysis. The results indicated that MBI-SS is quite reliable, but the tests used does not support the structure suggestion of the scale (Yavuz & Dogan, 2014).

Fernando Galan, Arturo Sanmartin, Juan Polo and Lucas Giner (2011) conducted a study on "Burnout risk in medical students in Spain using the Maslach Burnout Inventory – Student Survey". The authors aimed to study the burnout prevalence in preclinical and clinical medical students and assess the association between gender and burnout subscales. The overall findings of the study showed that the prevalence of burnout risk was significantly higher in 6^{th} year students compared with students in 3^{rd} year of clinical training and no significant association was found between gender and burnout subscales (Galán, Sanmartín, Polo, & Giner, 2011b).

Roelofs J, Verbraak M, Schmidt A, Keijsers G and de Bruin M (2005) conducted a study on the "Psychometric properties of a Dutch version of the Maslach Burnout Inventory

General Survey (MBI-DV) in individuals with and without clinical burnout". The total samples consisted of 168 Dutch individuals who were company doctors or general practitioners. They underwent a clinical interview followed by administration of the MBI-DV. It was concluded that the emotional exhaustion subscale was highly associated with clinical diagnosis of burnout and it could be used as a screening tool (Roelofs, Verbraak, Keijsers, de Bruin, & Schmidt, 2005).

Thomas J Kalliath, Michael P O'driscoll, Warren G, Bluedorn A and David F Gillespie (2000) conducted a study "A test of the Maslach Burnout Inventory in three samples of healthcare professionals". The authors' purpose was to examine the factor structure of the Maslach Burnout Inventory using the structural modeling approach. The data was obtained from 263 nurses, 199 laboratory technicians and 223 managers from the general community hospital in a large city in the Midwestern United States. The results obtained supported a two-factor concept of burnout consisting of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, having a greater inclination towards emotional exhaustion being the stronger one (Kalliath, O'driscoll, Gillespie, Warren, & Bluedorn, 2000).

METHODOLOGY

Aim

The aim of the research is to study the gender differences among human service professionals on the degree of burnout experienced.

Objectives

To understand the attitude of the individuals in the human health services on burnout.
To know the gender differences in the attitudes towards burnout.

Research Design

Experimental research design

Hypothesis

There is no significant gender difference for degree of burnout faced among human service professionals.

Variables

- Attribute – Gender
- Dependent variable – Burnout

Sampling

Population

The subjects chosen for this particular research belonged to human service professions like doctors, lawyers, government officials and hotel management professionals.

Sample size

The sample size is 60, which consisted of 30 males (50%) and 30 females (50%).

Sampling method

The sampling method was random. Non probability sampling: purposive sampling method.

Exclusion criteria
Professionals with mental health challenges were excluded as subjects. Similarly, those without proficiency in English were also excluded from the study.

Procedure
The questionnaire was administered via a google form.

Data Collection
Maslach's Burnout Inventory (MBI) standardized by Christina Maslach and Susan E Jackson in 1986 was used on the subjects. The questionnaire consists of 22 items which were scored on a 7 point scale.

Data Analysis
Unpaired t-test

Ethics
The subjects were briefed about the topic through a description, prior to sending the google form. The main aim of the research and its objectives were briefed. Subject's consent was obtained, prior to the responding of the questionnaire and were assured that the responses were only for research purposes and would remain confidential.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The study was conducted on a sample size of 60 individuals out of which 30 were males and 30 were females. Purposive sampling was used for data collection. The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) was administered on the sample. This inventory was developed by Christina Maslach and Susan E. Jackson in 1986. The inventory consisted of 22 items and descriptive norms were used.

Table 1: Table showing mean, standard deviation and standard error of the mean

GROUP	MALE	FEMALE
Mean	49.37	54.50
SD	12.67	19.97
SEM	2.31	3.65
N	30	30

According to table 1, the average score for males is **49.37**, while the average score for females is **54.50**. Based solely on means, females appear to have scored slightly higher than males. The standard deviation for males is **12.67**, indicating a tighter spread of scores around the mean. The standard deviation for females is **19.97**, suggesting a wider distribution of scores. The standard error of the mean (SEM) for males is **2.31** and for females is **3.65**. This indicates that the average scores are fairly reliable estimates of the true population means.

Table 2: Table showing t values and significance

Gender	t-value	Significance
Male	0.2394	0.5
Female		

The p-value associated with the t-test is **0.2394**. Since conventional criteria set the threshold for statistical significance at 0.05, this result is considered **not statistically significant**. The non-significant p-value ($p > 0.05$) suggests that I cannot confidently conclude that gender is a statistically relevant factor in burnout levels within this sample of human service professionals. In other words, the observed difference in average scores could be due to chance and may not reflect a true population-level difference.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The aim of the research was to study the gender differences towards experiencing burnout among the human services. The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) developed by Christina Maslach and Susan E. Jackson was administered on the sample.

Major findings

There is no significant gender difference among human services for experiencing burnout.

Limitations

- The study has been impeded from expanding due to the practical challenges associated with the factor of time.
- Generalizing the study is not feasible since the samples were obtained from a limited population.

Recommendations

- Conducting the study with a broader population is advisable.
- Exploring degrees of burnout in different occupations of human services through comparative studies is a viable approach.

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Acknowledgment
The author appreciates all the respondents who participated in the study and helped to facilitate a quality research work.

Conflict of Interest
The author declared no conflict of interest.

How to cite this article: Narreddy, V. & Suman, O. (2024). Examining Gender Differences in Burnout Levels Among Human Service Professionals: A Comparative Analysis. *International Journal of Indian Psychology, 12*(3), 095-102. DIP:18.01.010.20241203, DOI: 10.25215/1203.010