CONCEPT AND PROCESS OF BURNOUT - A LITERATURE REVIEW

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*Abstract:*This paper was designed to review the existing literature on burnout. It provides an understanding of burnout concept, process and its consequences on Individual as well as organisational level. The paper also categorises the predictors of burnout such as organisational, job related, occupational as well as socio-demographic characteristics. It also noted that systematic inquiries on burnout in Indian conditions are inevitable. Hence, the paper brings up new grounds for further studies in burnout.

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper is a review of the current literature on burnout. It describes the process of burnout, its determinants and consequences in the light of existing studies in the field. Burnout considered as a hurdle for the employees and organisation, specific inquiries about culture, organisations are inevitable. This article also tries to find out the gaps in the current literature to ascertain the scope of such specific studies in the Indian context.

2. BURNOUT

Job burnout is a crucial process among the people who engage in employment in any field. The concept introduced ina novel of 1961, which draws the life of an architect who gave up his profession and withdraws intothe jungle due to desperation and distress. (C. Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). Initially, the term burnout considered as a "pseudoscientific jargon" which tried to enter into the psychological literature through the backdoors. Schaufeli, one of the prominent figures in burnout research describe the status of an empirical paper on burnout which was rejected by a publisher in the name of pop psychology(W. B. Schaufeli, 2003).

After those initial rejections, burnout concept achieved the status of a metaphor for some of the crucial psychosocial problems among the employees and the working group. Eventhough burnout was introduced as non-theoretical abstract; occupational health psychologists tried to put forward it as an essential area of their concentration (Kristensen, Borritz, Villadsen, & Christensen, 2005). All these efforts encouraged to theorise the concept of burnout. HerbetFreudenberger and Christina Maslachwere considered as the pioneers in the field of burnout studies. Freudenberger viewed burnout as a syndrome that created from intra-personal conflicts, personality traits and mal-adaptive learning styles which demand a clinical intervention.

ConverselyMaslach argued for a scientific approach that dealt with the interpersonal, organisational and social factors that influence burnout in an individual. Thus, Maslach and her colleagues defined burnout in 1996 as "a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who work with people in some capacity"(C Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). Although, researchers and practitioners were recognised burnout like reactions among the individuals other than human service professionals like entrepreneurs, managers and so on. Thus Maslach and her colleagues extended the concept in 1996 itself by shifting its attention from client service to other work requirements as "a state of exhaustion in which one is cynical about the value of one's occupation and doubtful of one's capacity to perform"(Leiter & Maslach, 2016). After that, burnout became a prominent

subject in the handbooks of physicians and other health professionals of a few European countries. Furthermore, workshops and symposia were conducted to train health care professionals to asses and manage burnout.

3. THE BURNOUT PROCESS

Burnout was never considered as an incident that had happened all of a sudden. It is the outcome of continuous exposure to stress that reduces the individual's capability to act effectively. The process aspect of burnout argues that it has got different levels of advancement. Even though most of the authors in burnout agree on the process aspect in it, there is little harmony on the stages in the development of burnout. Cherniss proposed an interactive model of burnout where burnout follows three consecutive stages such as job stress, strain and defensive coping. As per the model, burnout is a continuous transactional process in which one stage feeds the next and thus forms a vicious cycle of burnout. The stages of this particular model are as follows,

1. "Work Stress": This stage is the result of a conflict between the required resources and available resources. Workers in this stage might not meet the desired goals due to the conflict,and it will lead them to the next stage as per Cherniss.

2. "Exhaustion": The second stage is the characterised by lack of interest, stress and boredom in association with the job. Exhaustion derives from the response of the worker towards stress they experience. Individuals who fail to manage the stress will move on to the next stage.

3. "Defence Suffix": The third stage is related to the changes in the behaviour or attitudes of the worker. They may adopt some changes in their behaviour to cope up with the continuous stress. It may lead them to cynicism or a detachment towards their clients and job as well(Cherniss, 1980).

There are many viewpoints about the stages of burnout progression. Each of the theorists in the field of burnout designed theirstages of burnout development. Even though there are distinctions in the stages of burnout, everyone accepts that burnout is a continuous process which develops into one stage to the other sequentially. Also, these reviews considered burnout as a consequence or response towards the job-related demands and stress. Moreover, such perspectives demanded a specific diagnostic criterion to define burnout and differentiate it from other related emotional and mental discomforts. The medical perspective considers burnout as "work-related neurasthenia" which is characterised by the following conditions as per ICD -10 classifications,

➢ "Both persistent and distressing complaints of feelings of exhaustion after minor mental effort, or persistent and distressing complaints of the feeling of fatigue and bodily weakness after minimal physical effort".

➢ The individual should express not less than two of the following symptoms like "muscular aches and pain, dizziness, tension headaches, sleep disturbance, inability to relax, or irritability."

➢ moreover, the patient could not recover from the symptoms by themselves owing to any of the coping strategies they adopt and this state should last at least three months from its onset (Centers et al., 2015).

Burnout cannot be considered as an individual problem; it may negatively impact the organisation as a whole. The most critical negative organisational consequence of burnout is decreased job performance. The persons who are under the influence of burnout may fail to satisfy their job demands effectively (Korunka & Tement, 2010; C. Maslach et al., 2001). It also associated with job dissatisfaction, lack of organisational commitment and turnover. Studies suggest that burnt out employees could not maintain a cordial relationship with their colleagues and may start conflicts with them(Gilbert, Laschinger, & Leiter, 2010; Naveed & Saeed Rana, 2013). In short, burnout is closely associated with the work settings where internal and external stressors are present. Researchers in the field of burnout classified these stressors under three categories such as Job characteristics, Occupational characteristics and Organisational characteristics(Christina Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001).

Job characteristics

According to Maslach and her colleague's quantitative job demands, workload, time pressure, the absence of autonomy and lack of feedback are related continuously to burnout. Also, the role conflict and role ambiguity create burnout as per the research results in the field. Role conflict occurs when the workers forced to meet the conflicting demands of the job, whereas role ambiguity begins when the worker fails to receive adequate information regarding the job and its functions.

Moreover, the influence of specific emotional requirements such as being empathetic, high customer demands when professionals are engaged in any "people work" (Christina Maslach et al., 2001). Besides, Lack of resources is found to be one of the precursors of burnout. Professionals who lack support from their colleagues, supervisors feel burnout. Maslach and Leiter reveal that those workers who do not have any control over the crucial dimensions of their job may feel burnout. Lack of control over their job may disrupt them to take appropriate decisions on situational demands,and they may fail to balance their interest with those of the organisation (C Maslach & Leiter, 1997).

Occupational characteristics

The initial researches which relate occupational specialities to burnout failed to find a relationship between burnout and specific professions. They concluded that burnout is everywhere and somewhat similar in any occupations. However, later researches in the similar field identified some occupation specific contributors of burnout. The people who engaged in human service professions are more prone to burnout as per the findings(Christina Maslach et al., 2001). Researchers who compared the burnout experience in different occupations also supported the same notion. They compared burnout profiles of five different occupations of the United States and Holland; and concluded that people who engaged in teaching reported high emotional exhaustion compared to the rest of the professionals. The research also revealed that there is a difference in burnout experience among the professionals of these countries. Mental health workers of Holland reported higher levels of exhaustion than the professionals of the United States(W. Schaufeli & Enzmann, 1998).

Organisational characteristics

The hierarchies, structure, rules and resources in an organisation may influencethe burnout of the workers. Consequently, the changes in the organisation such as downsizing and mergers may influence the psychological contract (i.e., the belief related to benefits that the employer is indebted to grant by promise) of the employees. As it maintains the impression of reciprocity; which is vital in employees well-being, the denial of psychological contract may lead to burnout (Christina Maslach et al., 2001).

Also, some of the individual characteristics contribute to burnout. These include demographicfactors, job attitude and personality of the workers. The previous researches in the field found that personal factors are directly related to burnout. Such researches point out the relevance of considering burnout as a social phenomenon rather than an individual one.

Socio-demographic characteristics

Among the significant demographic variables, age is continuously associated with burnout. Studies reported that younger employees report higher levels of burnout than the older ones. This negative correlation is expected to confound with work experience. For instance, burnout appears as a risk factor earlier in an employee's career. It begins to decrease when the employees get experienced in their work. Another view is related to the survival instinct of the employees, in which those individuals who burn out early in their professional career may leave their job. However, the employees who continue their job are either exhibit lower levels of burnout or expected to cope with burnout easily (Christina Maslach et al., 2001).

Still, there are some arguments in favour of gender and burnout. Studies that support the relevance of gender on burnout argue female employees are more vulnerable to burnout. On the contrary, some researchers argue that thereare no overall differences in burnout about gender. These differences may relate to gender role stereotypes where men are not expected to get affected by stress and burn outquickly. Also, the study also reflects the confounding of gender with the occupation, for example, most of the nurses are female,and police officers are expected to be male (Christina Maslach et al., 2001). Studies support the relevance of marital status on burnout experience. The male employees who are single about their marital status might get affected by burnout rather than married as well as divorced individuals (Christina Maslach et al., 2001).

It was also noted that education has a positive correlation with burnout experience. Individuals who are acquired higher education levels reported higher burnout compared to the rest of the people. Researchers argue that education may confound with other variables such as status, position and so on. Employees with higher education might encounter with a high level of stress if they failed to meet their targets(Christina Maslach et al., 2001).

4. CONCLUSION

To sum up, the problems of burnout and its effect on workers proficiency have been increasingly renowned in the academic literature worldwide; yet, there has been lack of systematic inquiries specifically designed among the Indian professionals (Das et al., 2015; Khera, 2017). It is also reported that studies which describe the influence of culture on burnout are essential to explore the specific contributing factors of burnout (Landsbergis, 2003; W. B. Schaufeli, 2003). Hence, it is inevitable to conduct specific studies on burnout within Indian context to identify the culture-specific determinants of burnout among the Indian professionals.

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