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Jasim Al-Asadi [1], Shukrya Khalaf [1], Aqeel Al-Waaly [2], Alaa Abed [3] and Sabah Shami [4]

[1]Community Medicine Department, College of Medicine, Basrah University, Basrah, Iraq (Correspondence to: Jasim N. Al-Asadi: jnk5511@yahoo.com). [2]College of Medicine, Missan University, Amarah, Iraq. [3]Community Medicine Department, College of Medicine, Thi-Qar University, Nasiriyah, Iraq. [4]Basrah General Health Directorate, Basrah, Iraq.

Abstract

Background: Studies from various parts of the world have shown that teachers are likely to suffer from burnout. So far, there has been no research on burnout among primary school teachers in Basrah, Iraq.

Aim: We aimed to determine the prevalence and predisposing factors of self-reported burnout among primary school teachers in Basrah.

Methods: This was a cross-sectional study in 32 governmental primary schools during November 2014–February 2015. A self-administered questionnaire was used to collect sociodemographic and work-related data using the Oldenburg Burnout Inventory.

Results: Of 800 questionnaires distributed, 706 (88.3%) were completed; 58.4% were from women. The prevalence of burnout was 24.5% (95% CI: 21.5–27.8). A statistically significant association was found between burnout and age, sex and marital status. Work-related factors that showed significant association with burnout were: work overload, problems related to career advancement, high number of students per class and student misbehaviour.

Conclusion: Burnout is an important health problem among primary school teachers in Basrah.

A number of risk factors, particularly those related to work, are amenable to modification since they are related to the education policy.

Keywords: Basrah, burnout, prevalence, teachers

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Introduction

The concept of professional burnout was first described in the mid-1970s, referring to “emotions of depletion and loss of motivation and commitment that social workers experience after prolonged and extensive stress conditions” (1,2). Shortly afterwards, it was characterized in detail by Maslach and Jackson (3) as a syndrome of excessive emotional load, or burnout, comprising a set of emotional and physical responses to chronic work stress.

Teaching stress is a prevalent and well confirmed problem (4). Job dissatisfaction and burnout among teachers can have personal implications such as absenteeism and decline in performance and productivity, and a negative effect on students’ outcome (5).

Risk factors for burnout among teachers may be organizational, such as work pressure, student misbehaviour (6), role stress (7), lack of support from peers and supervisors (8), school rules and type (private or governmental), school location (9) and financial considerations (10), or personal factors such as age, sex, marital status, years of service and self efficacy (11,12).

Survey data have indicated that both in the Western countries and in some Eastern European countries, about 10–40% of teachers suffer from burnout (13,14), while in Asian countries it may reach 50–70% (11).

Therefore, it becomes extremely important to investigate not only the sources or predictors of burnout but also their relationships. A considerable amount of information can be found on burnout and its related factors among school teachers in many countries, however, there is no known research on burnout among primary school teachers in Basrah, Iraq. In this study, we aimed to determine the level of self-reported burnout and the main sources of burnout among primary school teachers in Basrah.

Methods

Study design

This was a cross-sectional study carried out in Basrah City during the period November 2014–February 2015. The study was approved by the Research and Ethics Committee of the College of Medicine, Basrah University.

Participants

The study population included governmental primary school teachers of both sexes.

Sampling and sample size

The sample size was calculated assuming a prevalence rate of 50%, with a precision degree of 0.05 at the 95% confidence level, and a design effect of 1.8 (15). Taking into consideration a nonresponse rate of 15%, the sample size was calculated as 795. Eight hundred teachers (15.2% out of 5250 primary school teachers in Basrah City) received questionnaires.

Participation in the study was voluntary and participants were assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of the survey.

Data collection

A self-administered questionnaire especially designed for the purposes of the study was used to collect data including sociodemographic and occupational information. The survey form also

included questions about student misbehaviour, in-service training, career advancement, salaries, distance from school to residence, professional relationship, years of service, workload and job satisfaction. Student misbehaviour was defined as “those behaviours involving rule-breaking, violating implicit norms or expectations, being inappropriate in the classroom settings and upsetting teaching and learning (talking out of turn, disrespecting teachers, habitual failure in submitting assignments, copying homework, lateness to class, etc.” (16). Training was defined as activities to increase the knowledge, skills and positive beliefs of teachers.

Work overload has been defined as employees’ perception that they have more work than they can complete within a given time (17). Job satisfaction has been defined as a perceived relationship between what one wants from one’s job and what one perceives it as offering (18). The teachers were asked to indicate how satisfied they felt with their job. The scale of answers ranged from “very satisfied” to “not at all satisfied” (19). For statistical purposes, job satisfaction was dichotomized into satisfied and unsatisfied.

The Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (20) has been found to be valid in different populations and can be applied to any occupational group (21). An English version translated into Arabic was used to measure burnout in this study. Two independent bilingual reviewers checked the Arabic translation to ensure consistency.

The Oldenburg Burnout Inventory includes 2 subscales: exhaustion and disengagement. It exhibits good test–retest reliability and internal reliability ($\alpha > 0.80$) for both subscales (20). Each subscale includes 4 positively worded and 4 negatively worded items that are scored on a 4-point Likert scale from 1 “strongly agree” to 4 “strongly disagree”. After reverse scoring of the negatively worded items, the average was calculated for each subscale, with higher scores indicating higher level of burnout. The cut-off score above the 75th percentile on both subscales was considered as burnout.

Statistical analysis

The statistical analysis was made using SPSS, version 19. Frequencies and percentages were calculated for the categorical variables. Chi-squared test or Fisher’s exact test were used to assess the differences between these variables. Continuous numerical data were summarized as mean and standard deviation (SD). Logistic regression analysis was used to determine the independent predictors of burnout. Pearson’s correlation coefficient (r) was calculated to determine the relationship between job satisfaction and burnout; P

Results

A total of 800 questionnaires were distributed; 706 completed questionnaires were returned, a

response rate of 88.3%.

The mean age of respondents was 36.6 (SD 8.9; range 20–63) years, 58.4% of them were women. The majority (89.8%) were classroom teachers, and 36.7% had teaching experience of > 15 years (Table 1).

The mean of the total burnout scores was 38.9 (SD 5.6), while the means for the exhaustion and disengagement subscales scores were 23.3 (SD 4.4) and 15.6 (SD 4.2) respectively. Males showed significantly higher mean burnout scores than women for the total and both subscales. The prevalence of burnout among the teachers was 24.5% (95% confidence interval: 21.5–27.8).

Burnout was found to be negatively related to age. It decreased with advancing age and the difference was highly significant (P