

PSYCHOLOGY

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PROACTIVE COPING WITH JOB BURNOUT AMONG TEACHERS

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Abstract

The article is devoted to the problem of relationship between job burnout and proactive coping behavior. Burnout is a prolonged response to chronic emotional and interpersonal stressors on the job and very common among teachers. It is defined by the three dimensions of exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment. Proactive coping behavior is future oriented and helps one's to act in advance to prevent potential stressors. The result showed that teachers had an average level of job burnout. There were no significant differences between males and females in terms of proactive coping strategies except seeking of emotional support. The seeking of emotional support was used more often by women in comparison to men. Teachers with high level of proactive coping had lower level of job burnout. Proactive coping reduced level of emotional exhaustion and contributed positively to professional efficacy.

Keywords: work-related burnout, proactive coping behavior, teachers.

Introduction

In recent years, the issues of occupational stress and burnout have been receiving increased research attention. Occupational stress and burnout are seen as significant areas of study in light of the amount of time people spend on work-related activities. Research indicates that stress and burnout are major factors in the development of both physical and psychological illness.

The concept of burnout. Burnout is a term that is used to describe a state of physical, emotional and mental exhaustion that occurs in response to the stressors and strains of professional life. Three features have emerged in the study of burnout [1]. The first component of burnout is emotional exhaustion; that the teacher feels that he or she has nothing left to give to others on an emotional or psychological level. The second component is depersonalization; one experiences psychological detachment and social distancing that disrupts both personal and professional life. Teachers may develop callous attitudes toward pupils, students and colleagues. They may also view personal and professional events negatively or develop cynical attitudes. Reduced personal accomplishment is the third component of burnout; one feels that one is no longer effective in one's professional responsibilities [2].

Frequent, intense, and prolonged levels of occupational stress are the causes of job burnout. As burnout relates to teaching, it is a condition in which the stressors underlying emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment occur in such frequency and intensity that they seem insurmountable. The teacher perceives these events as a direct threat to his or her personal well-being. The teacher loses concern for and positive feelings or respect for his or her students. Reduced professional commitment and a desire to leave the profession are also associated with burnout. It is in this process of «burning out» that stress impairs health, leads to a deterioration in the quality of educational services, and eventually leads to unpredictable staffing patterns [3].

Proactive coping. Coping with stress is the subject of numerous articles and books. Because of the harmful effects of stress, attention has been focused on coping strategies and the ways in which they can alleviate stress levels and promote higher quality of life [4]. While in the past coping was seen mainly as reactive, more recently coping is being seen as something one can do before stress occurs [5].

Proactive coping is a coping strategy that is multidimensional and forward-looking. There are three main ways in which proactive coping differs from traditional, reactive conceptions of coping [6]. First, traditional coping forms tend to be reactive coping in that they mostly deal with stressful events that have already occurred, with the aim of compensating for loss or harm in the past; proactive coping is more future-oriented. Since the stressful events have already taken place, reactive coping efforts are directed toward either compensating for a loss or alleviating harm. In contrast, proactive coping is oriented more towards the future. It consists of efforts to build up general resources that facilitate promotion of challenging goals and personal growth.

The second distinction between reactive coping and proactive coping is that reactive coping has been regarded as risk management and proactive coping is goal management. In proactive coping, people have a vision. They see risks, demands and opportunities in the future, but they do not appraise these as threats, harm or loss. Rather, they perceive difficult situations as challenges.

Third, the motivation for proactive coping is more positive in that it derives from perceiving situations as challenging and stimulating whereas reactive coping emanates from risk appraisal, i.e. environmental demands are appraised as threats.

Proactive coping involves processes through which people anticipate potential stressors and act in advance to prevent them; this can be seen as proactive behaviour. To the extent that individuals offset, eliminate, reduce or modify impending stressful events, proactive behaviour can eliminate a great deal of stress before it occurs. The skills associated with this behavior include planning, goal setting, organization and mental simulation [7].

Method

Procedure and participants. 87 teachers were asked to participate in the study. Ages range from 23 to 69 years; the mean age of the sample is 46.06 years (SD = 9.18). On average teachers had been working for 18.97 years (SD = 9.93).

Measures. Burnout was measured using the MBI (Schaufeli, W.B., Leiter, M.P., Maslach, C. & Jackson) [8] in adaptation by Vodopyanova N.E., Starchenkova E.S. [9] which includes measures of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization (cynicism) and personal efficacy. Proactive coping was measured by The Proactive Coping Inventory (PCI). PCI is multidimensional and consists of six subscales that were developed to assess the various aspects of proactive coping (Greenglass, Schwarzer, Jakubiec, Fiksenbaum & Taubert). The six subscales are [10]:

1. The Proactive Coping Scale combines autonomous goal setting with self-regulatory goal attainment cognitions and behaviour.

2. The Reflective Coping Scale describes simulation and contemplation about a variety of possible behavioural alternatives by comparing their imagined effectiveness, and includes brainstorming, analyzing problems and resources, and generating hypothetical plans of action.

3. Strategic Planning focuses on the process of generating a goal-oriented schedule of action in which extensive tasks are broken down into manageable components.

4. Preventive coping deals with anticipation of potential stressors and the initiation of preparation before these stressors develop fully.

5. Instrumental Support Seeking focuses on obtaining advice, information and feedback from people in one's social network when dealing with stressors.

6. Emotional Support Seeking is aimed at regulating temporary emotional distress by disclosing feelings to others, evoking empathy and seeking companionship from one's social network.

Data were processed by SPSS.

Results

The teachers had an average level of job burnout. According to phase model of burnout by Golembiewski, Munzenrider [11] 28% of respondents had low, 38% - average, and 34% - high level of burnout.

There were no significant differences between males and females in terms of proactive coping strategies except seeking of emotional support. It was used more often by women in comparison to men ($p < 0,01$). According to Norcross, DiClemente and Prochaska [12], women, compared to men, use more coping forms involving interpersonal relationships. Women, more than men, are expected to be sensitive to others' needs, according to traditional gender-role expectations [13]. Additional findings suggest that women may utilize support from others through talking with one another. As Etzion and Pines [14] explained it, women are more often able to make more effective use of their support networks than men since they tend to talk more with others as a way of coping with stress.

The moderate correlations ($p < 0,01$) observed between reflective coping, proactive coping, strategic planning and preventive coping. It shows the importance of perspective reflection in the development of coping strategies that are cognitively oriented towards anticipatory preparation for future eventualities. These findings suggest that temporally, reflective coping may precede proactive coping, strategic planning, and preventive coping.

The sample was divided into two groups: 1) teachers with high level of proactive coping ($+1/2\sigma > \max$), 2) teachers with low level of proactive coping ($\min < -1/2\sigma$). Results of the comparative study showed that «proactive» teachers had low level of job burnout whereas «nonproactive» teachers had high level of job burnout. Proactive coping reduced level of emotional exhaustion ($p < 0,05$) and contributed positively to professional efficacy ($p < 0,05$). When teachers cope with stressful situations at work actively, when they consider difficulties as challenges and use recourses of social support the emotional exhaustion and cynism is less likely to be developed. Such coping behaviour will contribute to the improvement of professional skills and increase the sense of one's competence at work. The negative correlations were found between the burnout components and seeking of instrumental ($p < 0,05$) and emotional support ($p < 0,05$). Those findings have proved the important role of social support in preventing job burnout.

Conclusion

Taken together, results of the research indicate that proactive coping is a valuable and useful coping strategy in dealing with work-related burnout. In particular, proactive coping reduced level of emotional exhaustion and contributed positively to professional efficacy. This is because proactive coping focuses on accumulating resources and setting goals for improvement of life quality, so efforts contribute positively to a sense of professional accomplishment and competence. Thus, to the extent that individuals employ

coping strategies at work based on proactivity, they are more likely to prevent development of work-related burnout.

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