Work Demands, Supervisor Support, Coping and Burnout Among Teachers

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Statement of Originality

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Structured Abstract

Teaching profession is well-known for its high level of job stress but little is known about factors that could potentially affect burnout levels in teachers. Stress and burnout in teachers were found to have devastating effects for teachers, schools and students. One area of particular concern within the teaching profession is staff who are working with children diagnosed with Autism. These children have a unique set of characteristics such as impaired social interaction and communication skills which can have impact on their learning in the classroom. Multiple challenges and stress imposed huge pressure on teachers of these children which might lead to teacher burnout and attrition, therefore it was important to understand the burnout phenomenon and to seek ways to buffer teachers against the negative effects of burnout.

Purpose

The aim of the study was to investigate burnout syndrome among teachers working with children with autism and to investigate how coping styles, supervisor support and workload impact on burnout.

Methodology

Sixty-five school teachers in the Hunter Valley and Sydney region of Australia completed a battery of questionnaires including a demographic questionnaire, the Maslach Burnout Inventory, the Work Demand sub-scale of the School Organisational Health Questionnaire, the Perceived Supervisor Support Scale, the Coping Responses Inventory, and the Significant Others Scale.

Results

Results from hierarchical regression analyses indicated that the three components of burnout were associated with different factors: excessive work demands and the use of avoidance coping strategies played a central role in the prediction of increased burnout;
on the other hand, the satisfactory level of supervisor support predicts the decrease in teacher burnout. Specifically, emotional exhaustion was predicted by excessive work demands, discrepancies between ideal and actual supervisor support and two types of coping strategies (cognitive avoidance and emotional discharge). Depersonalization was predicted by discrepancies between ideal and actual supervisor support. Personal accomplishment was predicted by excessive work demands, cognitive avoidance coping and emotional discharge coping. For coping strategies, results suggested that emotional discharge coping was the most salient predictive factor of burnout. Teachers using more emotional discharge strategies experienced higher level of burnout. Cognitive avoidance coping strategies were found to increase emotional exhaustion and decrease teacher’s level of personal accomplishment.

**General conclusions**

Over eighty percent of the teachers that were teaching children with autism in this study reported moderate to high levels of emotional exhaustion. The present study found that the three components of burnout were associated with different factors. One of the prominent predictor of burnout was excessive work demands and it significantly predicted two dimensions of burnout (emotional exhaustion and personal accomplishment). Another interesting finding from this study was that discrepancy between ideal and actual level of supervisor support had a central role in understanding burnout in teachers teaching children with autism.

**Implications**

High job demands of teachers were found to be a source of teacher burnout. It is important for schools and education policy makers to improve working conditions for teachers. School and education policy makers should consider increasing support for teachers. The present finding indicated that teachers should avoid using avoidance
coping strategies to alleviate burnout. Also, supervisors of teachers should provide regular, high quality supervisions and they should try to understand the teacher’s needs in order to increase the satisfactory level of perceived supervisor support. This could be accomplished by regular meetings and needs of teachers could be communicated to their supervisor and make sure that support provided are effective and appropriate.
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