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The Relationship between Personality Traits, Perfectionism and Job Burnout: The Case of Iranian High-School Teachers

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Abstract

The present study aimed to investigate the relationship between personality traits and job burnout among high school teachers. To this end, 205 high school teachers were randomly selected through multi-stage sampling in Kashan, Iran. The data collection instruments included NEO Five-Factor Inventory–Form S (NEO-FFI-S), Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), and Hill Perfectionism Questionnaire. Pearson Correlation and Stepwise Multiple Regression were run in SPSS-22 to analyze the data. The results indicated that job burnout has a direct relationship with neuroticism and an inverse relationship with extroversion, agreeableness, openness, and conscientiousness. In addition, there is a statistically significant relationship between negative perfectionism and job burnout. Also, neuroticism, as the best predictor, as well as conscientiousness, negative perfectionism, and agreeableness could explain 27% of job burnout variance among teachers. Therefore, these traits could predict job burnout and, in turn, be good indices for job satisfaction. However, those with higher negative perfectionism are prone to experience more job burnout because of self-skepticism and self-criticism. Hence, more attention should be paid to the roles of these traits in teachers' job burnout.

Keywords: Personality Traits, Idealism, Job Burnout, High School Teachers

Introduction

Over the past few years, the concept of 'job burnout' has been investigated in health literature in jobs offering human services such as social workers, psychotherapists, and nurses; later, it was found that job burnout could also happen in other professions (Schaufeli, Leiter, & Maslach, 2009). Job burnout was first formally introduced by Frudenberg who examined it among people with helping professions (Hosseinian et al., 2007). Job burnout is a decrease in the person's adaption with stressors and leads to emotional and physical fatigue which cause negative self-concept and attitudes towards the job and communication with clients (Arulmani & Arulmani, 2004). It was first introduced as a social problem rather than a scientific concept (Maslach et al., 2001). Perceived underachievement, lack of opportunities for promotion, and inflexible rules and regulations makes the person feel trapped in an unfair system, leading him to develop negative

attitudes to his/her job (Bakker & Schaufli, 2013). Lack of interest in job, depression, feeling trapped in the job, helplessness, boredom, and loss of empathy (Barlow et al., 2013).

Factors influencing burnout are broadly categorized as personal factors (e.g. personal attributes, character traits) or environmental factors (e.g. working environment), with coping behavior employed to reduce stress (Kubo, 2003). workplace relationships, the role of the person or his/her profession in organizations, tension due to job promotion, the atmosphere and structure of the organization, people's problems in interpersonal communication within and outside the organization, and work-family conflicts are important factors causing job tension which has a relationship with job burnout (Parkes, 2005). Prevalence of this tension at work, particularly in recent decades, has induced extensive research on this issue and its impact on workers' performance (Chan, 2003). Job burnout usually occurs in jobs characterized with long-hours, close contact with clients (Sheesly, 2000). Due to extensive relationships with students and their parents as well as school staff, teachers are more susceptible to job burnout.

According to Shauffli et al (1999), psychological symptoms of job burnout include emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. Emotional exhaustion is feeling tired and fatigued at work, which might result in absence from work. Depersonalization creates an uncaring feeling, even hostility, toward either clients or colleagues. Reduced personal accomplishment is feeling the employee is not accomplishing anything worthwhile at work, which can lead to a lack of motivation and poor performance. They believe job burnout can cause reduced quality of services, job absence, and turnover. Job burnout syndrome is not considered a mental disorder, but it can lead to mental disability (Wisersman, 2002). Recent research shows job burnout influences lifestyle and job performance (Colomeischi, 2015).

Teachers are exposed to much stress at work, and in turn, they are prone to develop job burnout. More recent theories have suggested two categories of job burnout causes, namely, individual and situational factors. Individual factors include demographic variables, personality traits, and coping styles while situational factors include job characteristics, job expectations, and job resources (Maslach et al., 2001).

Research has shown that the same job conditions lead to different degrees of job burnout among different teachers due to different personal, interpersonal, and professional factors as well as personality characteristics (Shauffli et al., 1994). In other words, considering personality traits, people might have various needs, expectations, goals, and motivation. Therefore, each job and work environment is suitable for a particular personality trait.

Personality can be described in terms of five basic factors, often labeled as the *Big Five* (e.g., Digman, 1990; McCrae, 1992; McCrae & Costa, 1984). The current labels for the bipolar factors are (I) Extraversion versus Introversion, (II) Agreeableness versus Hostility, (III) Conscientiousness versus Lack of Conscientiousness, (IV) Emotional Stability versus Neuroticism, and (V) Intellect/Autonomy or Openness to Experience versus Lack of Intellect/Autonomy or Closedness to Experience.

Maslach (1998) found job burnout is related to personality traits especially neuroticism and psychological profile of job fatigue. Several personality traits have been studied to discover which are more probable to cause job burnout. People with lower hardiness gain higher scores in job burnout particularly in emotional exhaustion (Garrosa et al., 2006). Geuens et al (2015) found

that people with susceptible personalities are more likely to experience job burnout. Schwarzkopf et al (2016) have shown that personality traits like narcissism could produce depression and job burnout symptoms.

On the other hand, it seems perfectionist people also have susceptibility to develop job burnout. In other words, individuals investing considerable efforts to achieve their occupational goals and determine high standards might not succeed, and, therefore, suffer job burnout. Thus, perfectionism could be another factor contributing to job burnout among teachers. According to Frost et al (1990), perfectionism is defined as setting excessively high performance standards which could not be achieved (Banerjee, 2005).

Hamachek (1987) differentiating between normal and neurotic perfectionism, believes normal perfectionists set realistic standards, enjoy trying hard to achieve their goals, and recognize personal limitations; in contrast, neurotic/negative perfectionists set unrealistic standards and feel dissatisfied with their performance when they do not achieve their goals. In other words, individuals with negative perfectionism have high levels of self-skepticism and self-criticism. Therefore, neurotic perfectionism is related to problematic psychological consequences such anxiety, depression, and loss of self-esteem, but normal perfectionism has a statistically significant relationship with desirable personal standards, performance, and adaptation (Danielle et al., 2006).

Considerable research on job burnout in educational psychology has focused on emotional problems, hardiness, locus of control, gender, age, and other occupational factors such as students' misbehavior, inflexible management, crowded classes, low salary, school culture, etc. However, little is known about the role of personality traits and perfectionism in developing job burnout. Hence, the present study aims to investigate any possible relationship between five personality factors and perfectionism, in one hand, and job burnout, on the other, among teachers. In addition, it seeks to find out the extent to which personality traits and perfectionism could predict teacher burnout.

Method

The present study is descriptive with a correlational design. Using Krejcie & Morgan's Table (1970), 215 high school teachers were selected through stratified random sampling in Kashan, Iran, in 2015-2016 academic year. The participants filled out Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), Hill Perfectionism Questionnaire, and NEO-FFBI. Out of 215 distributed questionnaires, 205 were returned; hence, a response rate of 95% was achieved.

Instruments

Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI)

Using a 7-point Likert-type scale, the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) (Maslach & Jackson, 1981) measures emotional exhaustion (9 items, Cronbach's alpha = .91; sample item: "I feel emotionally drained from my work"), depersonalization (6 items, Cronbach's alpha = .80), and diminished personal accomplishment (7 items, Cronbach's alpha = .79). The reliability and validity of this instrument has been investigated in several studies. For example, Maslach (1981) reported Cronbach's alpha of the three components as 0.90, 0.79, and .71, respectively. Moreover, Azizi

et al (2008) have reported the Cronbach's alpha of the three components as 0.88, 0.62, and .77, respectively, in the context of Iran.

NEO Five-Factor Inventory–Form S (NEO-FFI-S)

The NEO-FFI-S (Costa & McCrae, 1992) is a 60-item self-report measure designed to measure the personality domains represented in the FFM. It was developed as a shorter version of the 240-item NEO Personality Inventory. To construct this instrument, Costa and McCrae (1992) selected the 12 items with the highest positive and negative factor loadings on each of the five factors: conscientiousness, neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, and agreeableness. Participants respond to items by endorsing their degree of agreement on a 5-point, Likert-type scale ranging from 0 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). Higher scores are indicative of relatively more conscientiousness, neuroticism, etc. Costa and McCrae reported Cronbach's α reliability estimates of .86 (Neuroticism), .77 (Extraversion), .73 (Openness), .68 (Agreeableness), and .81 (Conscientiousness). Numerous studies offering support for the validity of the NEO-FFI-S, including the factor structure, convergent and discriminant validity, and construct validity, are summarized in the manual (Costa & McCrae, 1992).

Hill's Perfectionism Questionnaire

Hill et al. (2004) developed a self-report questionnaire based on cognitive-behavioral perspective. This instrument includes 58 terms and 6 subscales and has been validated in the context of Iran (Bahrami & Farahani, 2011). The items are four-point Likert scale ranging from completely disagree (=1) to completely agree (=4). Cronbach's alpha coefficient has been calculated as 0.92. The test-retest reliability of this instrument has been reported as 0.736.

Results

Descriptive statistics including mean and standard deviation, and internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) and bivariate inter-correlation coefficients (Pearson's r) for all measures are reported in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive indices and intercorrelations between primary variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Job burnout	-								
2. Neuroticism	.41**	-							
3. Extroversion	-.30**	-.55**	-						
4. Openness	.022	.007	.07	-					
5. Agreeableness	-.40**	-.47**	.36**	.001	-				
6. Conscientiousness	-.39**	-.41**	.40**	.12	.46**	-			
7. Positive perfectionism	.09	.26**	-.02	.03	-.24**	.17*	-		
8. Negative perfectionism	.24**	.31**	-.07	.05	-.28**	.05	.74**	-	
9. Total perfectionism	.19**	.31**	-.05	.05	-.28**	.11	.89**	.96**	-
Mean	16.3	17.9	31.0	24.9	33.4	35.9	81.7	122.2	204.0
Standard deviation	11.49	6.55	5.12	3.83	4.95	4.29	9.92	15.73	24.05

As Table 1 indicates, neuroticism and negative perfectionism directly but agreeableness indirectly predict job burnout among high school teachers. Stepwise multiple regression analysis was used to predict job burnout and determine the distinctive role of each personality factors and perfectionism in explaining job burnout variance and detecting the best predictors.

The results of job burnout regression analysis based on personality factors and perfectionism showed that neuroticism ($\Delta R^2=.172$, $F(1,203)=42.16$, $P=.001$), conscientiousness ($\Delta R^2=.059$, $F(1,202)=15.51$, $P=.001$), negative perfectionism ($\Delta R^2=.032$, $F(1,201)=8.64$, $P=.001$), and agreeableness ($\Delta R^2=0.014$, $F(1,200)= 3.94$, $P=.048$) could predict 27% of job burnout variance in four steps, respectively. Other components of personality and positive perfectionism did not enter the equation of the analysis since they could not predict job burnout significantly. Table 2 demonstrates standardized and unstandardized regression coefficients in the fourth step.

Table 2. Standardized and unstandardized coefficients of stepwise regression of depression based on cognitive emotion regulation and mindfulness

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig
		B	SE			
1	(Constant)	3.249	2.144		1.515	.131
	Neuroticism	.727	.112	.415	6.494	.000
2	(Constant)	32.430	7.693		4.216	.000
	Neuroticism	.533	.119	.304	4.488	.000
	Conscientiousness	-.715	.181	-.267	-3.939	.000
3	(Constant)	21.980	8.346		2.634	.009
	Neuroticism	.395	.126	.225	3.142	.002
	Conscientiousness	-.832	.183	-.311	-4.560	.000
	Negative perfectionism	.140	.048	.192	2.940	.004
4	(Constant)	32.396	9.807		3.303	.001
	Neuroticism	.330	.129	.188	2.558	.011
	Conscientiousness	-.683	.196	-.255	-3.484	.001
	Negative perfectionism	.115	.049	.158	2.353	.020
	Agreeableness	-.345	.174	-.149	-1.985	.048

According to Table 2, job burnout could be predicted directly by catastrophizing in the first step, indirectly by mindfulness and refocus on planning in the second and third step, and directly by self-blame in the fourth step.

Discussion

Over the recent years, there has been a growing interest in job burnout among scholars and practitioners in human resources productivity, focusing on the negative effects of job burnout on work forces. Job burnout is considered as mental health problems in occupational contexts. Research has shown that people suffering job burnout have lower productivity, efficiency, and cooperation, which directly affects their organization.

As one of the most stressful jobs, teaching has received much attention. Chan (2003) found that one third of the teachers in his considered teaching as a stressful job. Job burnout syndrome, as a consequence of uncontrolled job stress, is one of the most serious concerns of teachers. In fact, it negatively affects teachers' mental health and professional effectiveness and efficacy as well as students' academic performance.

The results of the present study indicate that there is a statistically significant, positive relationship between neuroticism and job burnout; in other words, teachers' higher neuroticism leads to significant increases in their job burnout, which is in line with (Cano-Garcia et al., 2004; Fontana and Abouserie, 1993; Brich, 2002; Mohajer, 2003). All these studies showed that job burnout can be significantly and directly predicted by neuroticism. In fact, neurotic people have negative feelings such as fear, arousal, anger, guilty, and pervasive and constant boredom; thus, they have difficulty adapting with their workplace and consequently suffer more job burnout. The findings of the present study are in line with those of Morgan & DeBruin's (2010) study:

neuroticism has significant positive relationship with job burnout. Also, neuroticism has significant, positive relationship with emotional exhaustion and depersonalization and significant, negative relationship with lack of personal success. Neuroticism is the common element among predictors of each job burnout aspect in that teacher's personality traits can influence their job burnout (Colomeischi, 2015).

In addition, it was found that there is a negative relationship between extroversion and job burnout among teachers; that is, less extrovert people suffer more job burnout, which is in line with findings of several studies (e.g., Fontana & Abouserie, 1993; Mills & Huebner, 1998; Mohajer, 2013). Brich (2002) also reported a significant relationship between extroversion and personal success. Cano-Garcia et al. (2004) found that more extrovert people experience higher job burnout, which might be due to the fact that extrovert people are social, assertive, active, and outgoing, and hopeful to succeed in their future job. Moreover, Sulea, van Beek, Sarbescua, Virga, and Schaufeli (2015) found a significant, negative relationship between extroversion and burnout among 255 students.

The findings of the present study are in agreement with those of Morgan and DeBruin's (2010) study, indicating that extroversion has a negative relationship with emotional exhaustion and pessimism and a positive relationship with lack of personal success. Extrovert students have less emotional exhaustion because of their tendency for optimism and positive emotions. Moreover, they have a good potential for engaging in social activities; in fact, the social support they receive removes the negative effects of stress.

Furthermore, there is an inverse relationship between agreeableness and job burnout: people with less agreeableness experience more job burnout, which is in line with the findings of Garrosa et al.'s (2006) study. People with higher agreeableness are basically philanthropist, empathize with other people, are eager to help them, and believe other people have this positive relationship with them. On the other hand, people with less agreeableness are self-centered, suspect other people's intentions, and are more competitive rather than cooperative. Therefore, people with more agreeableness suffer less job burnout. Accordingly, Morgan & DeBruin (2010) found a significant, positive relationship between agreeableness and occupational competence, which is in line with the results of Bakker et al (2006)'s study. They showed emotional exhaustion is uniquely predicted by emotional stability, depersonalization is predicted by emotional stability, extraversion, and intellect/autonomy, and personal accomplishment is predicted by extraversion and emotional stability.

The findings of the present study are also in line with Cano-Garcia et al (2004) who found a positive relationship between conscientiousness and personal achievement. Also, Mohajer (2003) found a significant, negative relationship between conscientious and job burnout. Conscientiousness is theoretically defined as the ability to control impulses and having specific plans to achieve goals. Having realistic plans, a conscientious person assumes responsibility for his/her duties. Also, the findings are in agreement with Morgan and DeBruin's (2010) study where conscientiousness was reported to have a significant, negative correlation with emotional exhaustion and a significant, positive relationship with lack of personal success. In addition, in a meta-analysis, Alarcon, Eschleman, and Bowling (2009) found that the Big Five Personality Traits Model can significantly explain variance in job burnout.

In the present study, step-wise regression analysis of the results showed that neuroticism, conscientiousness, negative perfectionism, and agreeableness have the most prediction power for job burnout among teachers, respectively. This could be justified in that since people with more agreeableness tend to have more interactions with others, display more altruistic behaviors, and empathize with others more, they have higher professional motivation, which can predict job satisfaction and, in turn, job burnout. Also, self-control, the active process of developing and organizing personal duties, is higher among conscientious individuals. In fact, both 'the ability to control impulse' and 'having specific plans to achieve goals' are two aspects of conscientiousness. Therefore, both of them should be considered as key factors in studying job burnout.

The results indicated that there is a relationship between negative perfectionism and job burnout. Negative perfectionism refers to having unrealistically high standards in different areas such as job, excessive worry for one's mistakes, vast gap between actual performance and personal criteria, doubt about one's performance, and escape/avoidance motivation for negative consequences instead of motivation for positive goals or striving toward those goals, often called "positive striving" (Harris et al., 2008). Craiovan (2013) explored the relationship between job burnout, in one hand, and perfectionism, stress, and psychotic symptoms, in the other hand. They found a relationship between perfectionism and job burnout. Several studies (e.g. Muhammad & Badawy, 2015; Hill & Curran, 2015) also found negative perfectionism may contribute to job burnout. Also, Cagla and Gulay (2015) found a relationship between job burnout and perfectionism.

Conclusion

All in all, job burnout studies indicate that teachers with higher levels of self-concept are more resistant against stressors and environmental negative factors and perceive higher levels of achievement and competence in stressful situations (Colomeischi, 2015). Hence, personality traits and perfectionism should be considered in recruiting teachers, and suitable intervention protocols should be developed to enhance job satisfaction and reduce job burnout among teachers.

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