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## WORK-RELATED BURNOUT AND ENGAGEMENT IN PERSONNEL EMPLOYED AT SERVICE SECTOR IN GEORGIA

**Abstract:** A prerequisite for a successful organization lies in developing employees' strengths, creating goals and positive emotions for them, ensuring high level of engagement, and forming positive interactions. The present study aimed at exploring work-related burnout and engagement. Additionally, it was tested whether marital status of employees had any effect on burnout and engagement. Research was carried out among personnel employed at a rehabilitation center and an insurance company. Results showed high negative correlation between burnout and engagement,  $r(131)=-.697$ ,  $p = .000$ . However, no significant differences were found in burnout and engagement scores between married and unmarried employees.

**Key words:** Burnout, engagement, marital status, organizational psychology.

**Language:** English

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### Introduction

#### Literature Review and Hypotheses

Organizational psychology is focused on developing dynamic, healthy processes at organization, such as "flourishing" and resilience, as an important adaptive skill of individuals (Luthans, 2002), engagement, kindness, and enhancing positive human potential, such as motivation, altruism, unconditional self-commitment (Cameron, 2003).

#### Burnout

Studying burnout syndrome of an employee has been the focus of research for several decades. Increase in professional needs leads to increase in the impact of negative consequences on an individual's

health, which, in turn, affects an individual themselves, their life quality and, generally, the society at large. Burnout is a significant challenge for an organization, employees, and clients who get service from the latter, and the whole society.

The most common definition of burnout is proposed by Maslach & Jackson (1981a, p. 99): "Burnout is a syndrome of emotional exhaustion and cynicism that occurs frequently among individuals who do 'people work' of some kind."

Burnout is a metaphor to describe the state of mental exhaustion (Schaufeli, De Witte, & Desart, 2020).

According to the Maslach's inventory of emotional burnout (Maslach & Jackson, 1981b),

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professional burnout consists of three dimensions: 1) Emotional burnout – when one experiences emotional tension and constant fatigue; 2) depersonalization – when one distances oneself from one’s work, work-related tasks and obligations, and clients and colleagues (Kahn et al., 2006; Schaufeli & Enzmann, 1998); and 3) diminishing personal achievements, which can be seen as a sense of incompetence and lack of achievements at work (Maslach & Leiter, 2008).

Burnout is caused by imbalance between high requirements during work performance and insufficient resources (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). Unmet needs, disappointment, tension, failure to restore energy after stressful workday (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993) have negative effect on individual’s physical and psychological wellbeing, which might lead to absenteeism, insomnia, alcohol consumption, addiction to substances, family issues (Maslach & Leiter, 2008), sense of incompetence and lower work performance (Swider & Zimmerman, 2010).

### Engagement

Engagement is a multidimensional construct (Law et al., 1998; Rich et al., 2010), a psychological condition, during which people are focused only on the work they perform (Forgeard et al., 2011). The highest level of engagement is “flow” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). According to Csikszentmihalyi (1996, 1997), the highest level of engagement is characterized by the following: Person has exact goals and inner interest towards their tasks; task is pertinent to person’s qualification level; task provides direct and mediated feedback to person; person maintains a sense of control over one’s work; action and consciousness are in tune, and person is fully engaged in the work they are performing.

Like positive emotions, engagement is assessed subjectively (Seligman, 2011). Engagement in work at an organization involves intense concentration, absorption (Schaufeli, Bakker, & Salanova, 2006; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Kahn (1990) defined engagement of an employee as a holistic manifestation of person’s self (physical, cognitive, and emotional) in their job role (Joo & Lee, 2016).

Definition of work engagement proposed by authors (Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá, & Bakker, 2011) implies positive, complete work-related state of mind, which is characterized by the following: 1) Vigor – physical steadiness and highest level of energy; regardless challenges, person is ready to commit to work; 2) dedication – enthusiasm, absorption, pride and engagement in one’s work; 3) absorption – complete concentration on work. This leads to the sense of time flying fast and, as a result, person finds hard to get bored with their work (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

This element of wellbeing incorporates enjoyment, ecstasy, comfort, and warmth. However,

thoughts and feelings are absent during “flow” (Seligman, 2011).

Results of an organization are best reflected in an employee’s engagement (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002; Stander, Mostert, & de Beer, 2014; Woerkom, Oerlemans, & Bakker, 2015).

### Present Study

Schaufeli and Bakker (2001) argue that burnout and engagement are two distinct concepts and should be assessed independently. These two are contradictory concepts, but this does not mean that when one (burnout) is higher, the other (engagement) should be low *per se* (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2011).

The aim of the present study was based on this assumption, and it was explored whether higher levels of burnout would be related to lower levels of engagement and vice versa. Indeed, work engagement is characterized by high energy with person identifying oneself with the work performed by them. On the other hand, burnout is characterized by low energy where person cannot identify oneself with the work performed (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

Additionally, the present research focused on whether marital status could provide any differences in burnout and engagement levels. As certain studies suggest, single respondents showed lower level of burnout as compared to divorced participants (Zhang et al., 2020); also, married respondents showed lower burnout level than single participants (Harper, Alshammani, Ferdynus, & Kalfa, 2020).

### Method

#### Participants and Procedures

The study was carried out among personnel employed at a rehabilitation center (behavioral therapist, speech therapist, psychologist, occupational therapist, physical therapist, office manager, supervisor, housewife) and at an insurance company (sales managers).

133 respondents participated in the study with 10 males only. Participants’ age ranged from 20 through 74. As for their marital status, 40 were single, 69 were married, 11 – divorced, 11 were in a free relationship, and two were widowed. Out of 69 married respondents, 60 had children.

The questionnaire was sent out to respondents online, via Google Forms. Participation was voluntary, and instructions on how to fill it out, research goals, and information on study’s confidential nature were provided in the beginning of the survey. The time required for filling out the questionnaire was 40-45 minutes on average.

Prior to administering the questionnaire, participants read the informed consent. IP addresses have been deleted after completing the survey and no emails or names of participants were recorded. Data safety and privacy protection was ensured.

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### Instruments

*Burnout* was measured by Work-related Version of the BAT (Schaufeli, de Witte, & Desart, 2019). The questionnaire consists of 33 items. 23 items measure core symptoms: 1) Exhaustion, which is physically experienced as weakness or fatigue manifested in specific symptoms such as fatigue at work, lack of energy to begin the new day, inability to restore energy and have rest after work; 2) mental distance, which means that work process becomes aversive for person, they avoid contact with colleagues and even clients, enthusiasm and interest towards work is virtually absent and feels as if person functions on autopilot; 3) cognitive impairment – person finds difficult to make decisions independently; attention and concentration deficit are present as well as problems with focusing on one’s work; 4) emotional impairment – disappointment, anger and inability to manage one’s emotions at work. Other 10 items measure secondary symptoms: 1) Psychological complaints such as sleep problems, anxiety, weight loss without diet; 2) psychosomatic complaints, that is, symptoms manifested as a result of psychological problems, such as increased heart rate, chest pain, frequent sickness. Items for secondary symptoms serve as tools to gain additional information. Scores for core and secondary symptoms assess whether emotional burnout is a syndrome with its key element being exhaustion (Schaufeli, 2019). The questionnaire measures work burnout using 5-points Likert scale (1 = *never*, 2 = *rarely*, 3 = *sometimes*, 4 = *often* and 5 = *always*). Items were provided in original sequence. Using questionnaire is recommended both

individually and collectively at an organization to determine the level of emotional burnout.

*Engagement* was measured by the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003). The questionnaire includes 17 items assessing work-related engagement. The latter is defined as “a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003, p. 5). Items presented in the scale are divided in line with this definition, measuring three components of engagement: 1) Vigor – vitality, readiness and ability to resist the difficulties at work; 2) dedication – a sense of value of one’s performed work, enthusiasm, and inspiration; 3) absorption – complete engagement in the work process and a sense of happiness gained from the process. Answers are provided on 7-points Likert scale with 0 = *never*, 1 = *almost never* (several times a year or less), 2 = *rarely* (once a month or less), 3 = *sometimes* (a few times a month), 4 = *often* (once a week), 5 = *very often* (several times a week), and 6 = *always* (every day). Items were provided in original sequence.

### Results

Descriptive statistics showed that the level of burnout(Core Symptoms) of study participants was medium:  $M = 2.14$  ( $SD = .70$ ). Burnout(Core symptoms) scores range from 1 through 5. Scores obtained in the study were divided into four categories: 1) Low (0–1.60), 2) average (1.61–2.40), 3) high (2.41–3.29), and 4) very high (3.30–5). Percentages for each category are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1. Distribution of percentages for burnout(Core symptoms) levels**

Low	23%
Average	45%
High	26%
Very high	6%

Almost third of the participants (32%) scored high or very high on work burnout.

Analysis of secondary symptoms showed that respondent had higher burnout level:  $M = 2.47$  ( $SD = .83$ ). Similarly, scores of secondary symptoms range

from 1 through 5, and scores obtained in the study were divided into same four categories. Percentages for each category are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2. Distribution of percentages for secondary symptoms**

Low	14%
Average	43%
High	28%
Very high	15%

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In the same vein, almost third of the participants (33%) scored high or very high on burnout.

**Table 3. Correlation between burnout and engagement**

Correlations			
		BAT	UWES
BAT	Pearson Correlation	1	-.697**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	133	133
UWES	Pearson Correlation	-.697**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	133	133

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

Relationship between burnout and engagement was tested through Pearson’s correlation. As Table 3 shows there was a strong negative correlation between engagement and burnout,  $r(131) = -.697, p = .000$ .

Additionally, linear regression was performed with engagement as a predictor variable and burnout as an outcome variable. As Table 4 shows, regression model was statistically significant,  $F(1, 131) = 123.854, p = .000$ .

**Table 4. Regression on burnout: ANOVA**

ANOVA <sup>a</sup>						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	31.474	1	31.474	123.854	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	33.290	131	.254		
	Total	64.764	132			

a. Dependent Variable: BAT  
b. Predictors: (Constant), UWES

As shown in Table 5, engagement emerged as a statistically significant predictor of burnout,  $\beta = -.697, t = -11.129, p = .000$ .

**Table 5. Regression on burnout: Beta Coefficients**

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.741	.151		24.851	.000
	UWES	-.422	.038	-.697	-11.129	.000

a. Dependent Variable: BAT

Given the findings, regression equation can be produced:  $BAT = 3.741 + UWES * (-.422)$ .

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**Table 6. Regression on burnout: R-squared**

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.697 <sup>a</sup>	.486	.482	.50411
a. Predictors: (Constant), UWES				

Engagement can be accounted for 48.6% of variability of burnout scores (see Table 6), that is, 46.8% of variability in burnout scores can be explained by variability in engagement scores.

Pearson’s correlation was used to explore the relationship between age and burnout and engagement. However (see Table 7), no significant correlations were found between age and burnout or engagement.

**Table 7. Correlations of age with burnout and engagement**

Correlations		
		Age
Age	Pearson Correlation	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	
	N	133
BAT	Pearson Correlation	-.084
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.337
	N	133
UWES	Pearson Correlation	.001
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.992
	N	133

Independent samples t-test was used to explore the possible differences in burnout and engagement scores between respondents with different marital status. However, as the t-test showed, no statistically significant differences were found between single and married participants in neither burnout (mean difference = .22,  $t = 1.761$ ,  $p > .05$ ), nor engagement scores (mean difference = .10,  $t = .471$ ,  $p > .05$ ).

**Discussion**

The goal of the current paper was to study the relationship between work burnout and engagement among personnel employed at service sector in Georgia.

Although the study was carried out only at one rehabilitation center and one insurance company and the small size of the sample does not allow for generalizations, certain predictions can still be made.

It was hypothesized that low burnout levels would be associated with high engagement levels and vice versa (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2001). Indeed, the correlational analysis showed statistically significant strong negative association between the two variables. Additionally, regression analysis confirmed that

engagement significantly and negatively predicted burnout.

Also, according to the study results, respondents obtained high scores on core symptoms of burnout (exhaustion, mental distance, cognitive impairment, emotional impairment). Almost third of the participants (32%) had high or very high levels of burnout. Moreover, respondents demonstrated even higher levels of secondary symptoms of burnout (psychological complaints, psychosomatic complaints).

At an organizational level, it is important to implement the programs that would be directed toward reducing burnout consequences. Gross (1998) proposed strategies of emotional regulation such as cognitive reappraisal and suppression, improving ability to work and skills for employees in a manner that it is appropriate to the goals of an organization.

It is worth noting that, according to the results, age did not correlate significantly with burnout or engagement.

Certain studies (Cañadas-De la Fuente et al., 2018) suggest that marital status provides support and protection from cynical and indifferent attitudes at

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work. However, the present study did not show any statistically significant differences between single and married participants in neither burnout, nor engagement scores (Bakker et al., 2005; Zhang et al., 2020). Thus, it can be argued that marital status does not have any impact on burnout and engagement of those employed at the rehabilitation center and the insurance company where the research was conducted.

Scholars (Jeung et al., 2018) argue that enhancing employees' abilities and competences and

behavior modification strategies serve as important interventions at an organizational level.

### Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The present research has certain limitations. The instruments used in the study were translated in Georgian impromptu for the research without being validated and adapted to Georgian context. Another limitation is the small size of sample not allowing for generalizations to other organizations or larger population in general.

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