



Introduction to understanding the mechanism of burnout

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Abstract ;

This study seeks to explore the safety of an individual's psychological and health system, focusing on the absence of disorders that disrupt their normal life. Psychological burnout is one such disorder that individuals may encounter, making it crucial to understand its mechanism in order to prevent it. By doing so, individuals can maintain psychological balance and effectively carry out tasks and activities with ease.

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1. Introduction

Individuals live in various environments, such as the workplace and the family setting. The work environment, in particular, is a fertile ground for interactions between individuals and the members of the organization. Communication is often unavoidable for everyone, regardless of their role, whether as a manager or as a worker within the organization's team. As a result of these interactions, some individuals may experience unsatisfactory symptoms if they are unable to cope with their situations, both personally and professionally. These symptoms can serve as indicators of a developing disorder within the workplace, with psychological burnout being the most prominent. This research paper aims to examine the mechanisms of burnout in individuals by exploring the numerous interpretations of burnout and the resulting reactions that manifest in the individual.

2. The development of the concept of burnout

The term "burnout" was first introduced by Grahem (1960) in his case study of an architect. The concept gained traction in psychological research through the work of Freudenberger (1974), who conducted experiments on volunteers at a clinic in New York City. He described burnout as a collection of emotional and physical responses to work-related stress. As his research progressed, Freudenberger developed a diagnostic list to assess the level of burnout (Medouri, 2015, p.22).

Upon reviewing the literature, we find that the term "burnout" in English is synonymous with the concept of fatigue and exhaustion caused by the depletion of an individual's energy during work. The French term *L'épuisement professionnel*, meaning "professional exhaustion," conveys the same idea. The Japanese term *Karoshi* refers to death from overwork, representing the extreme form of burnout. In Arabic, there are three terms for burnout: psychological exhaustion, emotional depletion, and psychological burnout. Psychological exhaustion refers to a state of physical and physiological fatigue, without addressing the human and personal efficiency aspects of the worker. Emotional depletion focuses on the exhaustion of emotional and psychological energy but neglects the physical and efficiency dimensions. Therefore, the term "psychological burnout" is the most suitable for researchers, as it captures the three-dimensional nature of the condition (Medouri, 2022, p.218).

The evolution of the burnout concept over time can be summarized in the following table:

Table1. The temporal development of the concept of burnout

1700-1950	1950	1970	1998	2008
Mental fatigue	Occupational stress (Anglo-Saxon model) - Psychopathology at work (French model)	Burnout	Psychological harassment	Psychosocial risks include psychological stress, burnout, and psychological harassment.

Source: (Zawi, 2018, p. 16)

Burnout is generally described as a state of physical exhaustion, accompanied by emotional and mental depletion, which leaves the individual feeling weak, stressed, and drained due to the excessive use of their energy. It manifests as intense fatigue caused by continuous pressure, creating an imbalance between the individual's abilities and their demands. As a result, the person feels ineffective, hopeless, and incapable of handling any further stress, regardless of its source. This leads to the development of a negative self-image and adverse attitudes toward work, life, and others, ultimately causing burnout (Zawi, 2018, p. 19).

From the definitions of burnout, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- Burnout can affect anyone in society and is not limited to a specific group.
- Mental and physical exhaustion are the primary causes of burnout in individuals.
- Burnout can arise from interactions with others while fulfilling job responsibilities.
- In some cases, burnout leads to diminished motivation and negative attitudes toward one's work.
- Unmet needs and unfulfilled expectations are key factors contributing to the onset of burnout (Al-Shaer, 2017, p. 82).

3. Causes of burnout

Burnout is caused by specific stressors, including:

- Unrealistic expectations or goals
- Low wages

- Lack of positive feedback or rewards
- Desire to leave work
- Strained relationships with family and friends
- Administrative and routine tasks in the organization
- Failure to recognize personal successes at work
- Lack of interaction and relationship-building with colleagues (Al-Nouri, 2011, p. 90)

These causes can be categorized into three main aspects:

A. Individual Factors: Professionals who are highly committed to their work are more susceptible to burnout because they face internal pressures to perform, often coupled with circumstances beyond their control that limit their ability to deliver. Additionally, those with innate adaptability are less prone to burnout than those without such traits. Key individual factors contributing to burnout include:

- Unrealistic expectations and hopes, as they can lead to disillusionment and burnout.
- Satisfaction outside of work; when an individual focuses solely on work, the likelihood of burnout increases.
- Civic goals; social reformers seeking change through their work are more prone to burnout.
- Previous success in challenging roles, which can increase the pressure to continue performing at a high level.
- Self-evaluation; how an individual assesses their own performance impacts their vulnerability to burnout.

B. Social Factors: These factors stem from the increasing reliance on social institutions, which can intensify the job burden. This may lead to service delivery falling short of required standards or societal expectations, resulting in frustration and added pressure on the individual.

C. Functional Factors: The work environment plays a crucial role in both positive and negative outcomes for professionals. Work is essential for fulfilling basic needs like housing and health, as well as for meeting psychological needs such as appreciation, self-respect, personal growth, and independence. A lack of excitement in the work environment can contribute to stress and burnout, as monotonous and repetitive tasks increase tension. Additionally, the inability to meet personal expectations in one's job can lead to job dissatisfaction, further contributing to burnout (Al-Mahdawi, 2002, p. 15).

Al-Hatimi (2014) adds several other contributing factors to burnout, including:

- Lack of rewards and support
- Long working hours without breaks
- Isolation at work and weak professional relationships
- Repetitive tasks
- Monotony and lack of innovation in the work (Al-Hatimi, 2014, p. 13)

4. Indicators of burnout

4.1. Constant Preoccupation and Rushing to Complete Tasks:

When an individual is constantly preoccupied, they tend to neglect the present moment. As a result, their presence in meetings or interviews becomes merely physical, with their thoughts focused on past events or upcoming tasks. They perform their duties mechanically, without emotional engagement, prioritizing speed and quantity over mastery or attention to what is happening in the moment.

4.2. Postponing Enjoyable Activities and Social Engagements:

This occurs when individuals convince themselves that there will always be time to engage in such activities later, leading to a habitual pattern of procrastination and deferring social interactions or personal enjoyment.

4.3. Living by the "Should" and "Must" Rule:

In this state, individuals become unable to satisfy themselves personally, and their thoughts are consumed with the need to complete tasks in order to gain approval from others. The drive for external validation overrides their own desires and needs.

4.4. Loss of Perspective on Priorities:

The individual begins to lack clarity in dealing with situations, often elevating insignificant tasks to a level of extreme importance that requires dedication, thereby losing the ability to enjoy flexibility and spontaneity. They also become hesitant in making decisions (Al-Dosari, 2015, p. 69).

According to Al-Haraqi (2009), the indicators of burnout include the following symptoms:

4.5. Organic Symptoms:

Those experiencing burnout often suffer from headaches, fatigue with minimal effort, feelings of weakness and lethargy, and other related physical symptoms.

4.6. Behavioral Symptoms:

These are seen through social withdrawal, increased sleep duration, and heightened caution in interactions with others.

4.7. Emotional Symptoms:

The most prominent emotional signs include frustration, irrational fear, anxiety, and tension (Al-Haraqi, 2009, p. 92).

5. Stages of burnout

The burnout process unfolds in several stages, each characterized by a sequence that all individuals experiencing burnout go through. The duration and progression of each stage can vary depending on personal characteristics and the organizational context in which the individual works:

5.1. The Absorption Stage:

During this phase, job satisfaction is initially high but begins to decline as discrepancies arise between expectations and reality. The individual starts to feel a disconnect between their expectations and the outcomes they experience.

5.2. The Numbness Stage:

This stage develops gradually, with a steady decline in job satisfaction, decreased efficiency, and lower work performance. The individual also starts to feel that their physical health is deteriorating, leading them to shift their focus to other aspects of life, such as hobbies or personal interests, to occupy their free time.

5-3. The Separation Stage:

At this point, the individual begins to recognize the changes happening to them and withdraws psychologically. The deterioration of both physical and mental health becomes more apparent, accompanied by heightened levels of psychological stress.

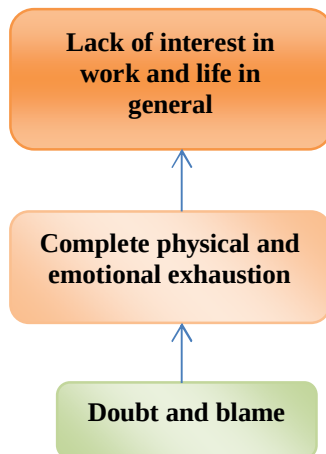
5.4. The Critical Stage:

This is the most severe stage of burnout, marked by noticeable physical, psychological, and behavioral decline. The individual's thought processes become disturbed by self-doubt, and they may experience a desire to escape their work situation, potentially even contemplating suicide (Al-Mahdawi, 2002, p. 21).

According to Maslach (2003), burnout develops in three stages. In the first stage, individuals feel pressure due to the imbalance between the demands of the job and their ability to meet those demands. In the second stage, this pressure manifests as emotional reactions, such as anxiety, fatigue, depression, and stress. In the third stage, the individual exhibits behavioral changes, such as treating colleagues mechanically, focusing more on personal needs, and showing a decline in

commitment to job responsibilities (Al-Salakhi, 2013, p. 1209). Overall, the burnout process typically unfolds as follows:

Fig.1. Stages of burnout



Source: (Al-Hatimi, 2014, p. 15)

6. The theoretical explanation for the occurrence of burnout

6.1. Behavioral theory:

According to behavioral theory, burnout is caused by environmental factors. If these factors are addressed, it becomes easier to manage burnout, as modifying behavior can lead to improved performance and productivity across various work fields (Al-Harraqi, 2009, p. 91).

Burnout, viewed as a behavior, results from the individual's learning process and their interaction with unfavorable environmental conditions, making it an abnormal behavior. Abnormal behavior refers to the inability to develop the necessary skills to cope with the environment, leading to the adoption of inappropriate behaviors. As burnout is an internal state influenced by external factors and challenging conditions, it can

be reduced by controlling these factors. Hence, behavior modification strategies can be applied to alleviate the impact of burnout and enhance performance (Kazem and Muftin, 2013, p. 48).

6.2. Cognitive theory:

This theory suggests that the source determining human behavior is internal. When an individual faces a particular situation, they inevitably reflect on it and seek to respond to achieve their goals. If their perception of the situation is negative, the inevitable outcome is the onset of burnout symptoms (Al-Haraqi, 2009, p. 91).

Human behavior is driven by internal cognitive processes through which individuals interpret situations to respond and accomplish their goals. If their perception is positive, it leads to satisfaction. However, if their perception is negative, it results in symptoms that contribute to the development of psychological burnout (Al-Salakhi, 2013, p. 1210).

6.3. Psychoanalytic theory:

According to psychoanalytic theory, burnout results from internal conflict between the components of the psyche—the ego, id, and superego. Psychological processes such as anxiety, agitation, depression, and burnout stem from these internal tensions, leading to external behaviors such as emotional numbness, stress, and social isolation (Al-Harraqi, 2009, p. 91).

Burnout arises from the repression or suppression of unacceptable and conflicting desires within the personality, which causes a conflict between the ego, id, and superego. This conflict may escalate to psychological burnout in its most extreme form. It can also occur when the ego loses its ideal, creating a gap between the ego and its external attachments, leaving the individual feeling unsupported. Psychoanalytic techniques, such as emotional venting, can be applied to treat psychological burnout (Farihat and Al-Rabdi, 2010, p. 1565).

7. Conclusion

Many symptoms and indicators of psychological disorders, along with the associated physical and mental issues, often overlap. A thorough understanding of the mechanisms behind the development of a particular condition or phenomenon is crucial for accurate diagnosis. This understanding then allows for effective monitoring and intervention to help the individual overcome the issue they are facing. The same principle applies when studying psychological burnout, where a clear understanding of how burnout develops in an individual is essential for creating strategies to prevent it. This enables the individual to overcome burnout and restore their psychological and physical balance.

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