

Job Burnout: A Socio-conceptual Perspective.

الاحتراق الوظيفي: قراءة سوسيو-تحليلية.

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ملخص:

يُعدّ السعي والاجتهاد والالتزام بالعمل مصادر للمتعة وتحقيق الذات، غير أنّ هذه التجربة قد تتحول لدى بعض الموظفين إلى مسار شاقّ ومستنزف للطاقة. ونتيجة لذلك، يبدأ الدافع نحو العمل ومستوى الأداء في التراجع، كما تفقد الأهداف المهنية التي كان الموظف يسعى إلى تحقيقها أهميتها، لتصبح مسألة عادية. ويرافق ذلك ظهور مشاعر اللامبالاة والسخرية التي تهيم على السلوك المهني بدل الحماس الذي كان يُميّز هوية الموظف المهنية. ويُعدّ هذا الوضع نتيجة لحالة مهنية-نفسية تصيب العامل داخل بيئة العمل، تُعرف بالاحتراق الوظيفي. وغالبًا ما يصيب الاحتراق الوظيفي فئة من الموظفين الذين يمنحون العمل مكانة مركزية في حياتهم، غير أنّهم يعجزون عن تحقيق التوازن بين متطلبات العمل والحياة الشخصية. وفي هذا الإطار، تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تسليط الضوء على هذه الظاهرة من خلال تقديم مجموعة من التعريفات، والكشف عن أبعادها المختلفة، والتعرّف على مصادرها الأساسية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الاحتراق الوظيفي، الإرهاق، تراجع الأداء، ضغوط العمل.

Abstract:

Striving, working and committing are considered as a very special pleasure, but for some employees, it may turn into an arduous and energy-sucking journey. Accordingly, their desire to work and performance begin to decline and their goals that they were fighting for turn into an ordinary matter. In addition to the indifference and sarcasm which dominate their behavior instead of the passion that was their identity. All of this is the result of medical condition that afflicts the employee at his/ her workplace which is so called "job burnout". The majority of employees who suffer from this disease "The occupational burnout" are special people who consider work as the most important thing in their lives, but they fail to reach the balance between work and personal life. In essence, the current study main focus is on shedding light on this phenomenon through providing as a set of definitions and to know its various dimensions and sources.

Keywords: Job burnout, Exhaustion, Performance decline, work pressure.

Introduction:

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The occupational burnout is considered as one of the psychological diseases that employees suffer from, and is among the topics that has always been a major concern of researchers especially recently. In fact, this issue has received great attention due to the psychological, social, and work pressures the employees are exposed to which in turn negatively affect the employees' personality and health. Accordingly, the negative impact the occupational burnout has on both the psychological and social status has ultimately affected the employees' way of working.

The occupational burnout can be defined as a psychological condition that affects an employee during his/her work journey which in turn leads to the lack of desire to work, a low level of productivity, along with the physical and mental fatigue caused by work pressures, dissatisfaction, lack of motivation and even the conflict of values within the workplace. In essence, the occupational burnout is considered a modern time psychological disease undergone by many employees in all sectors especially the educational and medical ones.

Research Questions:

From what is listed above, it is necessary to ask the following questions:

1. What is the occupational burnout?
2. What causes an employee to burn out?
3. How come a person full of passion to his/her career and job turn into a burning aching person at work?

Objectives of the study:

The current study aims to examine and familiarize people with the occupational burnout phenomenon through giving a set of definitions. Besides, to shed light on the most paramount factors which lead to the emergence of the occupational burnout. Moreover, to have a look on the dimensions and stages of the occupational burnout as well as to highlight a number of mechanisms to overcome this phenomenon. Furthermore, to reach the findings as well as propose some recommendations to be taken into account to get rid of this phenomenon.

1. Literature review:

1.1. Definition of job burnout :

Pines and Aronson define it as: “a state of physical, mental, nervous and emotional stress, a condition that occurs as a result of working with people and interacting with them for a long time and in a situation where we need to make double interactional efforts”. (**Hami & Saliha, 2018, p. 93**) . In the same vein, the researchers **Gold and Reth** define this condition of burnout as: “a condition that causes an individual to feel that their needs have not been met and their expectations have not been realized, and is characterized by disappointment and accompanied by psychological and physical symptoms leading to low self-esteem. It is a psychological symptom in which the individual loses interest in themselves

and their work feeling anxiety, stress, withdrawal, inertia and surrender as a result of workloads and inability to face their requirements.” (Ashour & Wahhab, 2017, p. 74)

Maslach also defines burnout as a:” syndrome of emotional exhaustion depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who do people work of some kind”. (Halbesleben & Buckley, 2004, p. 859)

Basing on the aforementioned definitions, we can derive a comprehensive definition of the occupational burnout, which is a state of the emotional, mental and physical exhaustion resulting from continuous stress for long periods. The latter occurs especially when the employee feels tired and unable to perform the required work tasks. As a matter of fact, there are several reasons that lead an employee to reach this state; namely, work pressures, exaggeration in their performance, drawbacks of satiety and irrational pursuit of perfection.

1.1. Theoretical frameworks for the study of the job burnout:

It is listed below some of the theories that dealt with the psychological phenomenon of the job burnout.

1.1.1. Psychoanalytic Theory:

The psychoanalytic theory interpreted the occupational burnout as a result of the ongoing psychological pressure on an individual's self for a long time seeking some interest and/or attention in work which represent a continuous drainage of individual's capabilities especially that they cannot face those pressures in a healthy way. It can also be the result of the psyche process of suppression of the allegedly unacceptable and/or contradicting desires. As these inner components battle, the psychological burnout constructs a foundation. Also, this condition of burnout can be resulted from the psychological gap between the parts of the self as the higher self-shrinks in the ego attempts to devour the other. Some techniques of the psychoanalytic school can be used to treat the occupational burnout, such as the 'intense emotional catharsis. (Masoud, 2010, p. 19)

1.1.2. Behavioural Theory:

The behavioural theory explains the occupational burnout in the light of the learning process as an abnormal behaviour acquired by an individual as a result of inappropriate environmental conditions. For example, a teacher who works in a school where the necessary educational means are not available with uncooperative principal and colleagues to teach students who do not have a sincere motivation to learn. The pressures of behavioural alterations to meet that problem via various stimuli will only worsen the situation especially that the base is already Unwelcoming. If those individuals and students won't acquire some techniques and useful behaviours in addressing their problems, a base for future psychological burnouts is already established. One of the behavioural techniques for alteration to avoid burnouts is the reinforcement technique through the increasing support to

individuals besides to self-control through mastery of psyche, avoiding stress, relaxation and taking warm baths. (Masoud, 2010, p. 19)

1.1.3. Existential Theory:

2. In its attempts of explanation of the burnout, this theory focuses on the lack of 'meaning' in an individual's life. When certain individual lose the meaning and significance of their life, they suffer from a kind of existential emptiness that makes them feel the void and meaninglessness of their life which in turn deprives them of the appreciation needed to encourage the continuity of life as a whole. With no goals achieved, such an individual is certainly exposed to an occupational burnout. Therefore, the relationship between the occupational burnout and the lack of sense meaning is a reciprocal one. They present two sides of a same coin. As an occupational burnout leads to the loss of meaning from an individual's life, and the loss of meaning in turn can lead to the occupational burnout.
3. It can also be said that the occupational burnout is in fact an advanced stage of a psychological stress that results from the interaction of the individual's traits and qualities with the surrounding environment. Should it be inappropriate or not aligned, the individual would feel uncomfortable with a predisposition to suffer the psychological burnout. If they are exposed to excessive pressures that they cannot bear being a burden on their shoulders or even not enough of a burden that they would know the right ways to deal with it, the individual would risk a reduction in productivity and even quitting the job altogether after a serious burnout pressure. At least the intention towards quitting would build up especially in cases of alternative occasions which demonstrates the serious perils of this occupational burnout and its lethal impact on the whole society. (Masoud, 2010, p. 20)

1.2. Sources of the job Burnout

The findings of abundant studies that examined the occupational burnout indicate that its sources can be classified into: stressful professional sources; personal and psychological sources.

1.2.1. Stressful Professional Sources: (Hadrous & farra, 2007, pp. 11-12)

- **Lack of Social Support :**

Social support from family, supervisors and colleagues is a vital source of an individuals' sense of psychological security while performing their profession; especially, when they face difficulties or come across shortcomings that could possibly threaten them as they realize that they are no longer able to face them all alone. They actually need the help of colleagues and the support of others. In the study of '**Khalil Jafar Hajjaj**' entitled: "Factors affecting job burnout among nurses at shifa hospital in the Gaza strip"; this study aimed to find out the most influential factor amongst the given independent variables about the occupational burnout: workload, role clarity, social support and reinforcement. This study has noted a set of results:

- There is a direct relationship between social support and a sense of achievement.

- There is an inverse relationship between social support and all dulled feelings.

There is a statistically significant relationship between support and occupational burnouts. Consequently, it is found that this study has confirmed to us that social support has a fundamental role in the employee's occupational burnouts; however, the researcher ranked the social support element in the third place in terms of its impact on such a burnout. (Hajjaj, 2013, p. 159)

While we can find a study by '**Lana Hassan Mohammed Mansour**' entitled: "Job Burnout and its Relationship to Social Support among Administrative Staff in the Directorates of Education in Hebron governorate"; this study aimed to explore the degree of occupational burnout and its relationship to social support among administrative staff in the directorates of education in Hebron governorate in the light of the given variables: gender, age, educational qualification and experience. This study established an inverse relationship between job burnouts and social support so that the more social support, the less job burnout and vice versa. Through these results we can conclude that the social support element has quite a significant role in reducing job burnout. (Mansour 2013, 95)

- **Role Ambiguity:**

'Zellers' defines a role ambiguity as a state of doubt which occurs when employees are unsure of their goals and of the means to achieve these goals. This role ambiguity state is due to a gap between what others expect from an individual working at their job, and what they should actually do. As a matter of fact, there are many factors that cause role ambiguity including: the duration of starting a career, moving from one job to another, the presence of a new manager in work and the change in the organizational structure of the establishment.

In '**Farida Iqarib**' study entitled: "The Impact of the Conflict and Ambiguity of the Professional Role on the Psychological Burnout of the School and Vocational Guidance Counselor"; her study aimed to explore the degree of ambiguity and conflict of the professional role of school and vocational guidance counselors. This study concluded that:

- There is a significant correlation between the professional role conflicts whereby the higher the degree of role conflict, the higher the level of psychological burnouts among school and professional guidance counselors.
- There is a correlation between the degree of ambiguity of the professional role whereby the higher the degree of ambiguity of the role, the higher the level of psychological burnouts of the consultant as well. (Iqarb, 2009)

Therefore, we conclude that the ambiguity of the role influences increasingly the level of job burnouts among employees.

While '**Said Bin Ali bin Dhafer Al Karan Al-Qahtani's**' study entitled: "job Burnout Causes and Methods of Treatment – a Field Study in the Emirate of Asir Region"; seeks mainly to examine the relationship between role ambiguity, role

conflict and role overload on a hand, and the level of occupational burnout on the other hand. The researcher has come to the following:

- Ambiguity of the role has a positive moral effect on the emotional exhaustion.
- Ambiguity of the role has a positive moral effect on poor communication with others.
- Ambiguity of the role has a positive effect on the feeling of the low achievement.

Thus, this study proves that the ambiguity of the role has a positive moral effect on occupational burnouts in its three dimensions mentioned above. (Al-Qahtani, 2021)

- **Increased Workloads**

Workloads are considered a negative manifestation of life within human organizations. To figure out whether the organization is facing an increase in workloads or not, the amount of unaccomplished work should be measured. It has been stated that increased workloads worsen the professional pressures that employees are exposed to as they feel burdened with their work burdens especially when these burdens are time-bound. Psychologically, this creates a state of anxiety and stress in order to complete the required tasks on the allotted time, which in turn, leave the employees unable to determine which tasks they should start first.

There are many studies that tackled the concept of work stress which is an aftermath of workloads being a major source of occupational burnouts. Moreover, to tackle the study of '**Odeh Allah Badawi Masharqa**' entitled: "The Relationship between Work Stress and Job Burnout - a Case Study of the Egyptian Arab Land Bank in Ramallah and Al-Bireh Governorate"; This study has a major aim to synthesize the relationship between work stress and the degree of its impact on occupational burnouts among employees of the Egyptian Land Bank in Palestine. Accordingly, this study reached a number of results most importantly:

- The greater the work pressure, the higher the level of the occupational burnout.
- There exists an impact of the dimensions of work pressure on the occupational burnout: foremost the job role, followed by the organizational climate and then the employees themselves. (Machariqa, 2019)

There is also a study by "**Said bin Ali bin Dhafer Al Karan Al-Qahtanis**" which concludes that:

- Role burden significantly affects the emotional exhaustion in a positive way.
- Role burden significantly affects the mistreatment with others.
- Role burden significantly affects the feeling of low achievement in a positive way.

Accordingly, through this study, we conclude that playing the extra role has a positive effect on occupational burnouts in their three dimensions. (Al-Qahtani, 2021)

In sum, through these studies and the listed previous ones on this phenomenon, we recapitulate that work pressure and its overloads have a significant impact on the occupational burnout condition as a whole.

- **Decreased Workloads:**

Lacking workloads can be considered as a source of inconvenience to employees which is represented in those tasks requiring decisions lesser than an employee's capabilities, and that do not challenge their capabilities. As the employees' quest to achieve effectiveness in performance is considered one of the main reasons for the occurrence of psychological hardship for them, which if accumulated for long periods turns into a job burnout stage.

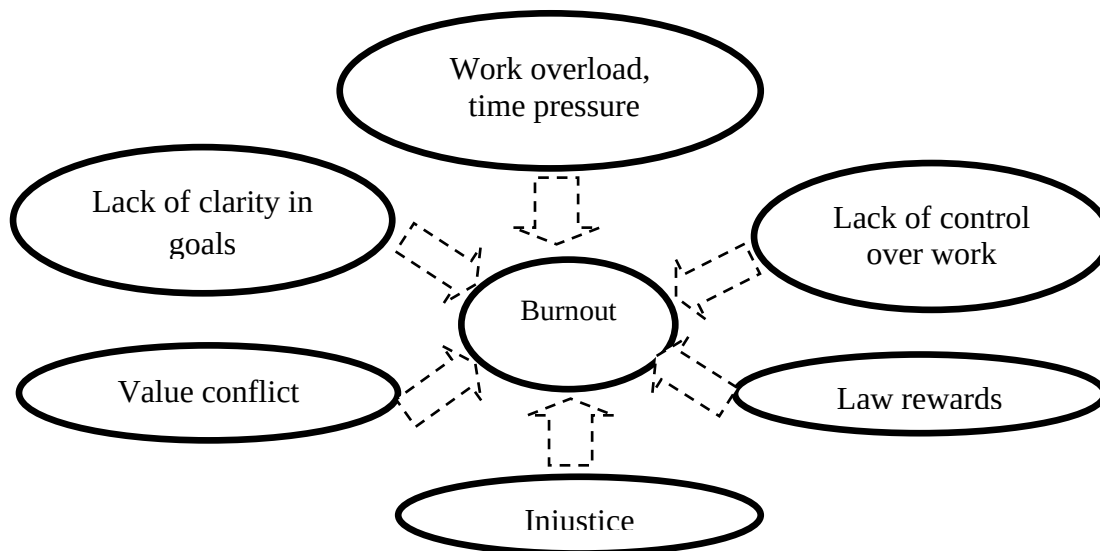
1.2.2. Personal and Psychological Resources

The personal and psychological sources are divided into 4 sources: gender, marital status, level of education, age. (Hadrous & farra, 2007, p. 13)

- **Gender:** according to some studies, it is concluded that female employees are more vulnerable to occupational burnouts as a result of the emotional stress by comparison to males who are more likely to have weak interest in the human dimension of interaction at all.
- **Marital status:** a study done by 'Metwally 2005' concludes that unmarried people suffer from burnout more than divorced ones.
- **Level of Education:** the same previous study by 'Metwally 2005' holds that individuals with higher educational levels are more prone to burn out than others.
- **Age:** individuals with younger ages are more likely to burn out.

On the other hand, we find that the researcher “Valérie Langevin” has summarized the sources of job burnout in the following figure:

Fig.1. showing the causes of job burnout



Source: (Langevin 2018, p10)

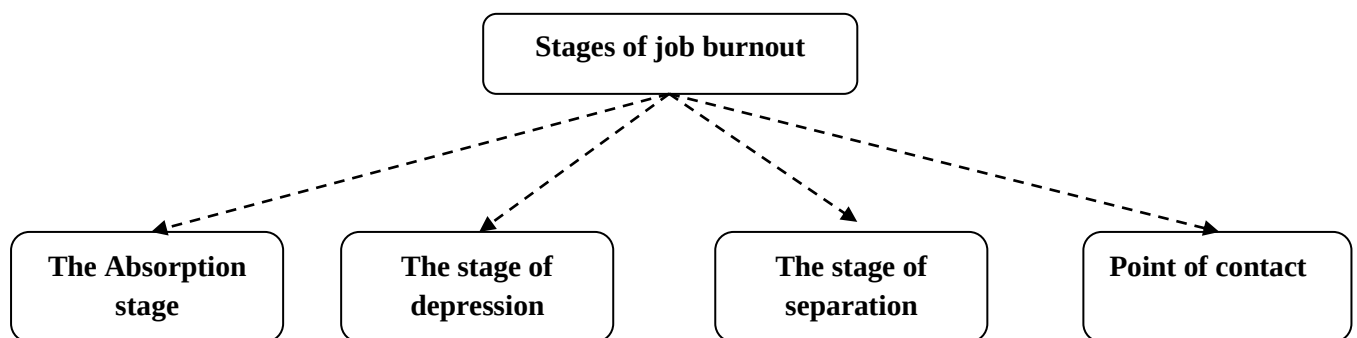
1.3. Stages of job burnout

This burnout condition goes through several stages namely: (Mansour, 2013, p.

13)

- **The Absorption Stage:** it is only at this stage that the level of work satisfaction is high including states of excitement and pleasure. Whenever a lack of alignment occurs between what the employee aspires to do and what actually happens the aftermath leads to a certain burnout.
- **The Stage of Depression:** this stage grows slowly as the level of satisfaction with work, efficiency, and the level of performance at work decrease, also the enthusiasm that resided in the first stage starts to vanish. The individual feels ill physically allowing their interest to shift from work to other aspects of life such as social contacts, hobbies and various activities from employment in spare times.
- **The Stage of Separation:** at this stage, the employee realizes what happened and begins to psychologically withdraw as the levels of psychological stress rise. At this stage, the individual reaches chronic exhaustion manifesting even in ill health physically and psychologically.
- **Point of contact:** it is considered the peak stage in the burnout chain since the physical, psychological and behavioral symptoms worsen and become rather dangerous. The individual's thinking patterns and cognition get disrupted as a result of continuous paranoia and self-doubt. Now, the individual reaches the stage of auto-destruction constantly contemplating leaving work or even thinking of suicide.

Fig.2. The stages of job burnout.



Source: prepared by the researchers

1.4. Dimensions of job burnout :

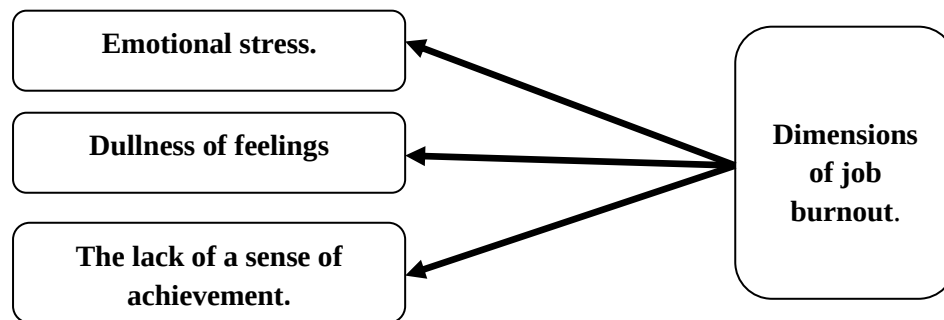
Maslach and Jackson considered job burnout a concept consisting of three dimensions which are (Boufrah, 2018, pp. 24-25):

- **Emotional stress:** this dimension is considered the cornerstone of the psychological occupational burnout, as the individual has an increase in

feelings of fatigue, anxiety, nervousness, low morale, inability to provide, emotional exhaustion, depletion of physical and psychological energy, and failure to work with other people.

- **Dullness of Feelings:** it can be defined that this dimension is a detachment from personal characteristics. At this stage, the emotionally exhausted and nervous individual tries to face the psychological pressures resulting from the displacement to negativity towards others. By compiling negative attitudes towards clients and co-workers and establishing imaginary barriers with them, the given employee suffering from the occupational burnout results a widening gap between themselves and others.
- **The Lack of a Sense of Achievement:** at this dimension, the employee acts in a negative way and feels incompetent and unable to achieve and that he/she is not qualified to deal with customers and provide them with help and assistance. The employee suffers from a lack of ability to face the problems encountered at work beginning to complain about his/her professional choices.

Fig.2. Dimensions of job burnout.



Source: prepared by the researchers.

1.5. Means of Dealing with job Burnout and its Treatment:

Several studies have presented proposals for solutions that can be used to overcome the psychological condition of occupational burnouts and to mitigate its negative drawbacks on workers and the work environment in general.

- **At the Staff Level:**

It is possible to adopt personal methods that can be followed to hinder the job burnouts phenomenon such as medical check-ups, rest and social support, transfers between employees, changing work patterns, creating opportunities for innovation and practicing various activities among employees, delegation of authority, administrative decentralization, preparation beforehand for how to address occupational burnouts and changing some negative undesirable behavior patterns within the work environment. **(Siddiq, 2017, p. 220)**

- **At the Level of the Organizational Tools:**

It is manifested in the role of the administration in assisting its employees to overcome the state of occupational burnouts and how to properly deal with it by raising employees' awareness of this phenomenon to prevent and fight its occurrence. Creating a healthy atmosphere among workers that promotes teamwork is another key, **(Siddiq, 2017, p. 221)** in addition to these steps which can be taken in order to bypass the case of occupational burnouts within the establishment:

- Avoiding exaggeration when it comes to professional expectations.
- Switching roles and responsibilities from time to time.
- Boosting responsibilities with independence for the employee
- The employee's understands of his work as well as his methods of responding to pressure.
- Paying attention to developmental programs and staff growth professionally, socially and psychologically.
- Dealing positively with pressures or controlling tensions.
- Dividing life into manageable areas of work, home, social life to focus as much as possible on every area in which we live at a time not allowing the pressures of the workplace to affect another place.
- Determining reasons through self-judgment or by resorting to tests that explain reasoning to the employees. (Siddiq, 2017, p. 222)

Conclusion:

In a nutshell, we can say that the psychological condition of the occupational burnout is our modern time scourge which whips vulnerable employees in their workplaces. It is a psychological mental illness in the form of a special kind of stress that literally haunts workers in their work environment as a result of psychological pressures they suffer from in their personal lives on one hand, and long-term work pressures and dissatisfaction on the other hand. Furthermore, this pathological condition negatively affects the life of employees, as they no longer hold the desire to perform their tasks in work feeling quite a decline in productivity as well as the actual loss of their personal identity. This type of hamster-wheel burnout involves high emotional or physical exhaustion, often accompanied by a sense of pessimism and desperation.

Recommendations:

Through our study, we reached a number of recommendations, including:

- The necessity to inform managers and employers of work-related problems in order to bring about changes and maintain a healthy work environment.
- The obligation of breaking away from work such as a vacations and leaves.
- The need for a still balance between work and personal life.
- The necessity of adjusting sleeping times so that employees do not suffer from exhaustion.
- The virtue of exercising sports regularly.
- The strengthening strategy of the work-motivation system and rewards “reinforcement” to hinder the phenomenon of job burnout.

To successfully implement these recommendations in the workplace, there needs to be cooperation between management and employees, as well as the allocation of appropriate resources to execute them effectively.

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