

International Encyclopedia of Rehabilitation

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Teacher Burnout in Greece

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Burnout is a work syndrome that stems out of the individual's perception of the inconsistency between the effort that one makes and the reward that one receives (Friedman 1995). Burnout is observed mainly in people who interact directly with others, such as educators or doctors, and is manifested through emotional and physical exhaustion, as well as many psychological symptoms, such as edginess, anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem (Farber 1991). It should be emphasized that the burnout experienced by teachers is a process and not just a simple fact, so each individual tends to cope with it in his/her own special way (Farber 1983). Burnout usually leads to decreased happiness and inability to perform adequately in everyday tasks (Burke and Greenglass 1995).

According to Leiter and Maslach (1998) burnout is characterized by: a) emotional exhaustion, which usually refers to a state of emotional drain and deprivation and often has physical manifestations, such as energy loss; b) depersonalization, which is described as cynicism, lack of idealism and negative or inappropriate attitudes towards other people; and c) decreased individual achievement, which usually coincides with decreased professional efficacy, productivity or ability, low morale and inability to meet the work demands. Therefore, it is possible according to this definition that teachers who experience burnout are more negative towards the behavior of their students.

The profession of the teacher is extremely demanding, leading thus to a substantial amount of teachers who experience increased work-related burnout (Evers, Brouwers and Tomic 2002) and cannot therefore perform adequately in their jobs. Several relevant studies have shown that many teachers have experienced feelings of burnout during their professional life (Burke et al. 1995; Friedman 1996; Schaufeli, Daamen and Van Mierlo 1994). In the United States teacher burnout has become a major issue, since it is estimated that 15-20% of teachers will experience some form of burnout sometime in their career (Farber 1991). Similar findings have been reported also in other countries (e.g., Evers et al. 2002).

However, the research on teacher burnout in Greece has been very limited. Koustelios and Kousteliou (1998) studied 100 primary and secondary schoolteachers, who mentioned that they were quite satisfied with their work but not with their salaries and their work prospects. Leontari, Kiridis and Gialamas (1996) asked 370 teachers and found that $\frac{1}{4}$ was not at all happy with their work, while only 13% was satisfied with

their work. Finally, Kantas and Vassilaki (1997), who researched almost double the number of teachers, concluded that Greek teachers experience less burnout in comparison to their colleagues from other European countries. The differences that were observed in relation to other countries may be due to the fact that primary schoolteachers in Greece work less hours, are not formally evaluated, have a permanent job for life, and the curriculum that they teach is determined to a great extent by the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs. It should also be emphasized that all the studies that were conducted in Greece are more than 10 years old and it is likely that the situation has changed since; therefore, it would be of interest to assess to which extent Greek schoolteachers experience burnout.

One recent study that was conducted in Greece with 384 primary schoolteachers (Avramidis and Kalyva 2007) revealed that male teachers who are exhausted express more negative attitudes towards the undesirable behaviors of their students. This finding is important given that teachers' observations and estimations are taken under serious consideration when referring a student with problematic behavior for assessment by the appropriate educational service (Prawat 1992). Kokkinos et al. (2005) have also found that teachers who experience burnout perceive the behaviors of their students as more undesirable, while a basic differentiation between those two studies is that the present study did not find any differences according to the years of teaching experience. Moreover, female teachers may be more positive towards the undesirable behaviors of their students because they are the ones who are responsible for the upbringing of children in the traditional Greek society and thus are more tolerant of or used to such behaviors (Kataki 1998). Therefore, the creation of a healthy and refreshing work environment seems to be a prerequisite for the best possible work performance of the teachers and should be part of every educational policy or reform.

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