
WORK ENGAGEMENT AND BURNOUT AMONG UNIVERSITY PG STUDENTS

ARYA NAIR, SARATH. P, MANIKANDAN, K.

Abstract: To compete effectively in the contemporary academic world, students are expected to be in a positive, fulfilling work related state of mind called as work engagement and are expected to work with Vigour, Dedication and Absorption. As the current academic curriculum is highly demanding and competitive the students are prone to burnout to keep in pace and meet the demanding situation. This study attempts to analyse the relationship of work engagement and burnout among university PG students. The study was conducted among 165 University post graduate students in which 89 are males and 76 are females. The Burnout and work engagement scales were administered. Results revealed that there exists significant correlation between work engagement and burnout in total sample and within sex. But there exists no significant difference between males and females in the relationship of work engagement and burnout.

Keywords: Burnout, University Students, Work engagement.

Introduction: Work engagement is most often defined as "... a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by Vigor, Dedication, and Absorption" (Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá, & Bakker, 2002). In essence, work engagement captures how workers experience their work: as stimulating and energetic and something to which they really want to devote time and effort (the vigor component); as a significant and meaningful pursuit (dedication); and as engrossing and something on which they are fully concentrated (absorption).

The job demands-resources model assumes that job demands, such as elevated levels of pressure, undue expectations, and conflicting requirements, tend to provoke burnout. In this context, job demands represent any facets of a role that demands sustained effort to accommodate or withstand difficulties. The effort that needs to be applied to accommodate these demands depletes energy, culminating in exhaustion (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

In contrast, job resources, including autonomy, support, and feedback, can all foster engagement as well as mitigate the adverse consequences of undue job demands (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). By definition, resources facilitate work goals, curb job demands, or stimulate growth. Specifically, these resources can facilitate learning or elevate effort, which can temper the exhaustion that demands tend to provoke.

Many studies have demonstrated that job resources promote engagement. As Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) demonstrated, constructive feedback, social support, and coaching from supervisors were positively associated with three dimensions of engagement: vigor, dedication, and absorption.

Within the Job Demands-Resources model, the presence of job demands (e.g., work pressure) and the absence of job resources (e.g., social support)

relate to burnout through a psychological energetic process, whereas the presence of job resources associates with work engagement through a motivational process. Although various mechanisms have been suggested to understand these processes, empirical evidence for these mechanisms is scarce within the JD-R framework.

Another phenomenon that studied across a wide range of organizational and occupational settings is Burnout. Burnout is the outcome of chronic stressors on the job. It creates negative impact on both individual and the organization. It is difficult to give a clear definition to the term Burnout. But, it can be understood by defining its different dimensions. The multidimensional theory of burnout mentions the three dimensions of Burnout-exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy (Maslach, 1998). Exhaustion is experienced when an individual is depleted of one's resources due to workload. Such a reaction will result in cynical activities. Cynicism is the negative response to various aspect of job. It also defined as depersonalization of the individual. It develops a feeling of inferiority in relation with competence, achievement and productivity at work which together termed as Inefficacy.

The use of the term burnout began to appear with some regularity in the 1970s in the United States, especially among people working in the human services. Earlier writing also mentioned similar problem in other names. This popular usage was introduced in Greene's 1961 novel, *A Burn-Out Case*, which tells a story of a spiritually suffered architect who quits the job and withdraws into the forest. Earlier researches developed the concept of job burnout into a psychological syndrome is caused by chronic interpersonal stressors on the job. This research has gone through two distinct phase, the pioneering phase and empirical phase. (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001).

In pioneering phase, the works tried to explore the term burnout. The initial articles on the phenomenon appeared in the mid-1970s in the United States. It was related with experience of people working in public services which is filled with emotional and interpersonal stressors. The pioneering works were written by Freudenberger and Maslach. Most of the initial works was descriptive and qualitative in nature, which used interviews, case studies, and on-site observations as the technique. The studies showed that emotional exhaustion is not an uncommon response to such job overload. The people also described how they tried to cope with the emotional stresses of their work when they are gone through the problem depersonalization. The findings in this phase were applied in the social, economic, historical, and cultural factors of those days.

In 1980s, the second phase of empirical research, burnout research was characterized by the use of quantitative methods such as questionnaire and survey methodology and studying larger subject populations. The research was also tried to assess burnout, and several different measures were developed. The scale that has had the strongest psychometric properties was Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) the test was revised by many times by researches overtime and still using. The burnout assessment is largely used in the area of industrial-organizational psychology as burnout was related with job stress, job satisfaction, Organizational commitment, and turnover. The industrial-organizational research along with clinical and social psychology, developed different perspectives on burnout and strengthened by the development of standardized tools and research designs. In the 1990s this empirical phase continued with several new areas such as, computer technology, military, managers etc. And works are still continuing with more sophisticated methodology, tools and design.

From U.S, the works on burnout expanded all over the world. Recent work on burnout has begun to develop new theoretical frameworks that explain behavior in terms of the interaction of person and environment. Many of these interactional models tried to analyze in terms degree of fit, or congruence, between person and environment even though they consider them as separate entities (French, Rodgers, & Cobb, 1974) Later, Maslach and Leiter (1997) formulated a model that focuses on the degree of match, or mismatch, between the person and six domains of an individual's job environment in which the greater mismatch, between the person and the job, will cause the greater the likelihood of burnout and the greater the match (or fit), cause the greater the likelihood of engagement with work. The six domains include workload, control, reward,

community, fairness, and values.

Burnout arises from chronic mismatches between employee and their work setting in terms of some or all of these six areas. Therefore these six domains are major areas in burnout researches.

Burnout is associated with performance of the individual in the work place. The job performance is related with job satisfaction, commitment and several withdrawal symptoms such as absenteeism, intention to leave the job, and actual turnover. The exhaustion component of burnout is will cause stress-related health outcomes which have a negative effects in individual in terms of mental health, such as anxiety, depression, drops in self-esteem, and so forth. As the outcome is negative in sense, researchers in organizational field focused to find out the factors contributing to the burnout. Both situational and individual factors are contributing towards individual burnout. Situational factors are related with work settings and Individual factors are related with demographic factors, personality characteristics and job attitude of the individual. As the burnout influences the individual and organizational effectiveness, organizational psychologists are recently focused on the studies related to burnout within the organization (Becker, 2005; Goodman, 2002; Chenevey, 2008).

There are a number of researches in the area of wok engagement and work related burnout. Wok engagement is studied across the world, as it influences the performance of the individual or it is related to some other aspects of an individual which influence performance (Bakker, 2012; Tahir, 2012). Burnout also studied across the world, especially on teacher burnout, burnout among nurses, doctors, managers etc. But very few studies were identified on academic burnout of students. As an organization, educational institutions experienced with the problem of student burnout. There are studies which focus on student's burnout as it is a major problem in academic institutions. (Neumann, 1990; Kiuru, 2008; Masjuan, 2009). These studies focus on the relationship between student's burnout and their work engagement as it influences both individual and organization (Schaufeli, 2002; Uludag, 2010).

Objective:

1. To study the relationship of work engagement and burnout among university students.

Hypotheses:

1. Work engagement and burnout is negatively related among University students.
2. The variable sex has a significant influence on the variable work engagement and burnout.

Method

Participants: The participants of the study consists of 165 University students in which 89 are males (53.9

%) and 76 are females (46.1%). The participants belong to I semester (3.6%), II semester (49.1%), and IV semester (40.06%) and were from different disciplines (commerce, management, science, humanities and languages).

Instruments:

1. The MBI-General Survey consisted of sixteen items that constituted the three sub-dimensions of exhaustion, cynicism and reduced sense of professional efficacy. All the items were scored on a 7-point frequency rating scale, ranging from 0 (never) to 6 (always). These sub-dimensions were regarded as interrelated but conceptually distinct. Total burnout score was calculated by adding the exhaustion, cynicism and reduced professional-
efficacy scores. In this study Burnout was assessed with a modified version of the MBI-GS that was adapted for use in student samples. For instance, the item "I feel emotionally drained from my work" was rephrased as "I feel emotionally drained from my study." The test-retest reliability for the subscales is exhaustion .80, Cynicism .86 and professional-efficiency 0.67. The scale has concurrent validity.
2. Work Engagement Scale: Utrecht work engagement scale (UWES) developed by Schaufeli and his colleagues (2002) was used to measure work engagement of employees. This scale measures absorption (6 items); vigor (6 items); dedication (5 items). Altogether the scale consists 17 items which are rated on a 6 point frequency based scale (0=never, 6=daily). The Cronbach alpha for the scale was found to be .92. Scale has reasonable construct validity.
3. Personal Information Schedule- The relevant information such as gender, birth order, work experience etc was collected through background information schedule.

Procedure: The participants were met in their respective living place in the hostel and requested to participate in the study. Investigators explained the objective and intention of the study and confirmed their participation by given written consent and they were given the assurance that their responses will be kept confidential and used only for research purposes. Then the two instruments along with the personal information schedule were distributed to them. After completion of responding to these instruments, it was collected back and checked for any omission or incompleteness. The responses were scored as per the scoring scheme and entered into a spread sheet for statistical analysis.

Results and Discussion: Every organization aims to increase its performance. As an organization, educational institutions are also forced to increase

their performance of both students as well as the institution. In this scenario, it is important to analyze the various factors related to individual which in turn would reflect in their performance. Here, the relationship of work engagement and burnout among university students is analyzed and discussed in detail.

To know the relationship between Work engagement (vigor, dedication and absorption) and Burnout (exhaustion, cynicism and inefficacy), Pearson correlation was computed and the results are presented in the table 1.

Table 1

Correlation of Work engagement and Burnout

Variables	Exhaustion	Cynicism	Inefficacy
Vigor	-0.16*	-0.32**	0.33**
Dedication	-0.26**	-0.38**	0.51**
Absorption	-0.10	-0.22**	0.48**

*p< .05, **p< .01

From the table it can be seen that, the variable exhaustion is negatively correlated with the vigor and dedication (r= -.16, p< .05; r= -.26, p< .01) and it has no significant relationship with the variable absorption. It means that, depletion of subjects resources decreased the energy level and caused a low mental involvement towards their work. From the table, it is found that the variable cynicism is negatively correlated with all the three variables- vigor, dedication and absorption (r= -.32, p< .01; r= -.38, p< .01, r= -.22, p< .01) which states that, students cynical behavior caused low level of engagement towards their studies. The table also shows that the variable inefficacy is positively related with vigor, dedication and absorption (r= .33, p< .01; r= .51, p< .01; r= .48, p< .01). The result is just opposite to the commonsense, but here it can be interpreted in such a way that, subjects have realization of their inferiority complex which forced them to perform well and is reflected in their engagement.

To know whether there exist any significant correlation and difference in the relationship between the components of work engagement and burnout dimensions by their sex, separate correlation was calculated for male and female then the test of significant difference between the relationship of these variables were computed and the results are presented in the table 2, 3 and table 4.

Table 2 Correlation of Work engagement and Burnout for male			
Variables	Exhaustion	Cynicism	Inefficacy
Vigor	-0.13	-0.37**	0.40**
Dedication	-0.25*	-0.47**	0.51**
Absorption	-0.17	-0.35**	0.49**

*p< .05, **p< .01

When males were taken into consideration, it is

found that the variable exhaustion has a negative relationship with the variable dedication ($r = -0.25, p < .05$) but it has no significant relation with vigor and absorption. The result states that the students' energy, devotion and concentration on their work is not influenced by their utilization of resources. The table also shows that that the variable cynicism is significantly and negatively related with all three factors of work engagement- vigor, dedication and absorption ($r = -.37, p < .01$; $r = -.47, p < .01$; $r = -.35, p < .01$) which suits to our general conception about its relationship. It confirms that depersonalization of individual will lower their engagement towards work. From the table, it can be understood that the variable inefficacy is positively related with vigor ($r = .40, p < .01$), dedication ($r = .51, p < .01$), and absorption ($r = .49, p < .01$). It may be because of that, feeling of inferiority motivated to perform well to establish their identity in the organization which in turn reflected in their engagement.

Variables	Exhaustio n	Cynicis m	Inefficac y
Vigor	-0.24*	-0.24*	0.25*
Dedicatio n	-0.26*	-0.29*	0.58**
Absorptio n	0.03	-0.03	0.45**

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

From the table, it can interpret that exhaustion is negatively correlated with work engagement variables vigor and dedication ($r = -.24, p < .05$; $r = -.26, p < .05$). It also states that the same variable has no relation with absorption at any level. It shows that female students' energy level and dedication towards their work is influenced by over use of mental and physical resources in a negative sense. The variable cynicism showed negative relationship with vigor and dedication but the variable has no significant relationship with absorption ($r = -.24, p < .05$; $r = -.29, p < .05$) which confirm that the cynical activities of the students will decrease the energy level and involvement towards their given work. The variable inefficacy seemed to be strong positive relationship with all the work engagement variables- vigor, dedication and absorption in a positive direction ($r = .25, p < .05$; $r = .58, p < .01$; $r = .45, p < .01$). Just like the male students, the inefficacy of female students forced them to engage well in their work. Sex has always some important role in work place especially in human service industry. To know whether there exist any significant difference in the relationship of work engagement and burnout between males and females, tests of significant difference in correlation

was computed and the results are presented in table

Variables	Exhaustion	Cynicism	Inefficacy
Vigor	0.70	0.95	1.02
Dedication	0.06	1.34	0.64
Absorption	0.89	2.23*	0.38

* $p < .05$

Table 4 gives the differences in the relationship between the dimensions of work engagement (vigor, dedication, absorption) and burnout (exhaustion, cynicism, inefficacy), it can be understood that there exists significant difference in the relationship pattern of work engagement variable absorption and burnout dimension cynicism in male and female students ($t = 2.23, p < .05$). Absorption is characterized by being fully concentrated and happily engrossed in one's work, whereby time passes quickly and one has difficulties with detaching oneself from work whereas Cynicism means the negative response to various aspect of job. It also defined as depersonalization of the individual. It develops a feeling of inferiority in relation with competence, achievement and productivity at work which together termed as Inefficacy. The result shows that male students and female students are different in perception of absorption and cynicism. It may be because of the difference in psychological makeup and cognition that made a difference in the pattern of the relationship between two variables in male and female. If males are absorbed in a work there is very low probability of them getting depersonalized or to develop negative attitude towards work. Since in females there is no such correlation between absorption and cynicism, even if females are totally engrossed in their work, there is a probability of them getting depersonalized and develop negative attitude towards their work.

Conclusion: Every work in this competitive world demands vigor, dedication and absorption which can be collectively termed as Work engagement. In the context of students the academic vigor, dedication and absorption with which the students are working to excel can expose them to burnout bringing about exhaustion, cynicism and inefficacy. In order to understand the co-existence of the elements of work engagement and burnout, and to study the relationship among these variables, this study was conducted on the university P.G students.

The results show that the variable Vigor is negatively correlated to exhaustion and cynicism and positively correlated to inefficacy. It can be concluded that when the students are working with more vigor in their academics they are able to overpower the

negative elements like exhaustion and cynicism but if any student is aware of his inefficacy in terms of academic challenges, he works with more vigor to excel.

In the same way dedication and absorption have negative correlation with exhaustion and cynicism and positive correlation with inefficacy. More the students work with dedication and get absorbed in their academics, the lesser will they feel exhausted and cynical but if they are aware of their inefficacy in the past academic performances, they will work with more vigor to excel.

When the relation between these variables was separately studied in males and females, it was observed that, in males vigor and exhaustion have no relationship but vigor is negatively related to cynicism and positively related to inefficacy. Thus it can conclude that males perform in the academic activity with vigor, the chance of their depersonalization or development of negative attitude towards work is very low and if they believe that they are inefficient of excelling in the field they work with more vigor. Similar relation is found between absorption, exhaustion, cynicism and inefficacy respectively.

Dedication is negatively correlated to exhaustion and cynicism means the more the student is dedicated to his work the lesser will be the experience of exhaustion and depersonalization in the course of

work. As the student is aware of his inefficacies he will work with more absorption to achieve success. In females similar results were obtained except for the fact that in males exhaustion has no relationship with vigor but in females exhaustion is negatively correlated to vigor. Cynicism is also not affected by absorption.

Comparison of the relationship of absorption and cynicism among males and females found to be significant. If males are absorbed in a work there is very low probability of them getting depersonalized or to develop negative attitude towards work. Since in females there is no such correlation between absorption and cynicism, even if females are totally engrossed in their work, there is a probability of them getting depersonalized and develop negative attitude towards their work.

The study of this kind in student sample is very useful as work engagement and burnout are related to academic performance and also previous researches concluded that "Academic performance (i.e., the ratio of passed exams in the previous term relative to the total number of exams) is negatively related to burnout and positively related to engagement. It also appeared that—irrespective of country—particularly students who feel efficacious and vigorous are more likely to perform well compared to those who feel less efficacious and vigorous (Schaufeli, et al, 2002).

References:

1. Arya Nair & Manikandan, K. (2013). Meaning in life, Organisational Commitment and Work Engagement of Employees, Business Sciences International Research Journal, 1 (2) 338 – 346.
2. Bakker, A. B. (2005). Flow among music teachers and their students: the crossover of peak experiences. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 66, 26-44.
3. Bakker, A. B., & Demerouti, E. (2007). The job demands-resources model: State of the art. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 22, 309-328.
4. Bakker, A. B., & Demerouti, E. (2008). Towards a model of work engagement. *Career Development International*, 13, 209-223.
5. Bakker, A. B., & Schaufeli, W. B. (2008). Positive organizational behavior: Engaged employees in flourishing organizations. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 29, 147-154.
6. Bakker, A. B., Demerouti, E., & Euwema, M. C. (2005). Job resources buffer the impact of job demands on burnout. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 10, 170-180.
7. Bakker, A. B., Demerouti, E., & Verbeke, W. (2004) Using the Job Demands-Resources model to predict burnout and performance. *Human Resource Management*, 43, 83-104.
8. Bakker, A. B., Demerouti, E., de Boer, E., & Schaufeli, W. (2003). Job demands and job resources as predictors of absence duration and frequency. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 62, 341-356.
9. Bakker, A. B., Hakanen, J. J., Demerouti, E., & Xanthopoulou, D. (2007). Job resources boost work engagement particularly when job demands are high. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 99, 274-284.
10. Becker, J, A, H., Halbesleben, J, R, B., & DanO'Hair, H. (2005). Defensive Communication and Burnout in the Workplace: The Mediating Role of Leader-Member exchange. *Communication Research Reports*, 22(2), 143-150.
11. Chenevey, J, L., Ewing, J, C., & Whittington, M. S. (2008). Teacher burnout and job satisfaction in agricultural education teachers. *Journal of Agricultural Education*, 49(3), 12-22.
12. French, J. R, P. Jr., Rodgers, W., & Cobb, S. (1974). Adjustment as person-environment fit. In G.V. Coelho., D.A. Hamburg., & J.E. Adams, *Coping*

- and Adaptation,(Ed) 316-33. NewYork.
13. Goodman, E, A., & Boss, R, W. (2002). The Phase of Model of Burnout and Employee turnover. *Journal of Health and Human Services Administration*, 25(1), 33-47.
 14. Kiuru, N., Aunola, K., Nurmi, J, E., Leskinen, E., & Salmela-Auro, K. (2008). Peer Group Influence and Selection in Adolescents' School Burnout: A Longitudinal Study. *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly*, 54(1), 23-55.
 15. Masjuan, J, M., & Troino, H. (2009). University Students' Success: A Psycho-Sociological Approach. *Higher Education*, 58(1), 15-28.
 16. Maslach, C. (1998). A multidimensional theory of burnout. In C.L. Cooper (1998). *Theories of Organizational Stress* (Ed) pp. 68-85. Oxford Univ. Press, UK
 17. Maslach, C., & Leiter, M. P. (1997). *The Truth About Burnout*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
 18. Maslach, C., Schaufeli, W, B., & Leiter, M, P. (2001). Job Burnout. *Annual Review of Psychology*.52, 397-422.
 19. Neumann, Y., Neumann, E, F., & Reichel, A. (1990). Determinants and Consequences of StudentsBurnout in Universities. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 61(1), 20-31.
 20. Schaufeli, B.W., Martinez, M. I., Pinto, M. A., Salanova, M., & Bakker, A. B. (2002), Burnout and Engagement of University students: A Cross-National Study. *Journal of cross cultural psychology*, 33(5), 464-481.

Research Scholar, Research Scholar, Associate Professor
Department of Psychology
University of Calicut, Kerala, 673635
thinktankangel@gmail.com,sarathnavodaya@gmail.com,
manipsych@gmail.com