

Burnout syndrome in teachers at higher technological institutes: a diagnostic study

Síndrome de Burnout en docentes en institutos Superiores Tecnológicos Universitario: un estudio diagnóstico

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Abstract

Received: July 12, 2025

Approved: September 03, 2025

Soto, G. (2025) Burnout syndrome in teachers at higher technological institutes: a diagnostic study. *Revista multidisciplinaria de investigación científica*, Vol. 9, No. 4. 65-73

Burnout syndrome, or professional burnout, is a condition derived from chronic work-related stress, which particularly affects committed workers, and not exclusively those in care professions, as was initially thought. This study addresses its incidence among teachers at the Instituto Superior Tecnológico Universitario Corporativo Edwards Deming (ISTUCED), revealing symptoms such as emotional exhaustion, sleep disturbances, lack of motivation, and physical symptoms with no apparent medical cause. Through a mixed-methodological design that included document review and teacher surveys, it was identified that, although the majority maintain their vocation and do not consider changing professions, a significant proportion experience signs of burnout. Stress does not appear to be linked exclusively to objective workload, but also to emotional and organizational factors. The study concludes that teacher burnout has a direct impact on individual well-being and educational quality. It is recommended to implement both personal interventions (such as mindfulness and psychotherapy) and institutional interventions (improving the work environment, empathic leadership, teacher recognition policies) to prevent and mitigate its effects.

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Keywords: Burnout, Teachers, Emotional Exhaustion, Workplace Stress, Organizational Well-being

Resumen

El síndrome de Burnout o desgaste profesional, es una condición derivada del estrés laboral crónico, que afecta especialmente a trabajadores comprometidos y, no exclusivamente, a aquellos en profesiones asistenciales, como se pensaba inicialmente. Este estudio aborda su incidencia en los docentes del Instituto Superior Tecnológico Universitario Corporativo Edwards Deming (ISTUCED), evidenciando síntomas como agotamiento emocional, alteraciones del sueño, desmotivación y síntomas físicos sin causa médica aparente. A través de un diseño metodológico mixto que incluyó revisión documental y encuestas a docentes, se identificó que, aunque la mayoría mantiene su vocación y no considera cambiar de profesión, una proporción significativa experimenta signos de desgaste. El estrés no parece estar vinculado exclusivamente a la carga laboral objetiva, sino, también, a factores emocionales y organizacionales. El estudio concluye que el Burnout docente tiene un impacto directo en el bienestar individual y en la calidad educativa. Se recomienda implementar intervenciones tanto personales (como mindfulness y psicoterapia) como institucionales (mejora del clima laboral, liderazgo empático, políticas de reconocimiento docente) para prevenir y mitigar sus efectos.

Palabras clave Burnout, Docentes, Agotamiento emocional, Estrés laboral, Bienestar organizacional

Introduction

Burnout syndrome, also known as occupational burnout, has become a significant problem in the workplace. It is an increasingly common dilemma in today's world, and its causes are deeply linked to contemporary social, economic, technological, and cultural factors, including excessive work demands, long working hours, poor work-life balance, pressure for productivity and results (especially in competitive environments), digital hyperconnectivity, which means that many people are always available, even outside working hours; job insecurity and precariousness, lack of organizational support, lack of empathetic leadership or clear communication, toxic or unhealthy organizational culture, among other factors.

The term "burnout" comes from the English language and means "to be burned out." It is recreated in the novel *A Burn-out Case*, published in 1961 by Henry Graham Greene, known as Graham Greene, a British writer, screenwriter, and literary critic. It was first described in 1974 by German-American psychiatrist Herbert J. Freudenberger, who observed that his teammates at a clinic for drug addicts, after 10 years of treating patients, suffered from a loss of energy and empathy towards them, compounded by exhaustion, anxiety, depression, and demotivation at work. He therefore defined this pathology as a state of exhaustion, fatigue, and frustration due to a professional activity that does not meet expectations. Since it was coined, more than a hundred definitions of this problem have been put forward.

The WHO defines it as “(...) the result of chronic work-related stress that has not been successfully managed.” It is characterized by three dimensions: feelings of exhaustion or loss of energy, increased mental distance from one's work or feelings of negativity or cynicism related to one's work, and reduced professional efficacy.

In its early days, it was exclusively related to professions of this type. An example of this is the creation of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), a tool designed by psychologist Cristina Maslach of the University of California, Berkeley, together with Susan E. Jackson, Michael P. Leiter, Wilmar B. Schaufeli, and Richard L. Schwab. This questionnaire was developed to measure personal burnout in human services areas such as health and education. Maslach uses the term “burnout” to describe a new clinical syndrome characterized by exhaustion observed among mental health professionals. This tool is a questionnaire covering 22 items on the feelings and attitudes of professionals in their work. Its function is to measure professional exhaustion and the frequency and intensity with which burnout is experienced by evaluating the three aspects of this syndrome: emotional exhaustion or fatigue, depersonalization, and personal fulfillment.

It was not until 1988 that the limited view that this syndrome only affected this type of professional came to an end. Pines and Aronson crossed the boundaries established by Maslach, arguing that any type of professional can suffer from it. These authors, together with Kafry, created the Burnout Measure (BM), also known as the “Professional Exhaustion Scale,” which is used to assess burnout syndrome and, according to , directly relates this condition to tedium. This scale applies to professionals in the service and support fields and other areas of work. It consists of 21 items in its short version, which measure the frequency of physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion.

Indicates that each person expresses the symptoms of burnout in a unique way, as the rate of burnout is linked to their personality; however, it is possible to characterize those who suffer from this syndrome by three aspects: deterioration of commitment to work, emotional exhaustion, and a mismatch between the person and the job. These consequences encompass different areas of life: on a personal level, it can lead to sleep disorders, anxiety, depression, chronic fatigue, and other physical and mental health problems; while on a professional level, it can lead to decreased work performance, less commitment to the institution, absenteeism, and increased staff turnover. In addition to this, it should be noted that, in the academic field, teachers affected by burnout may have a reduced ability to engage in the teaching-learning process, which has a negative impact on students.

Ecuador is not exempt from this situation. According to a study conducted by Multitrabajos, 83% of Ecuadorian talent report symptoms of burnout, which represents a notable increase compared to previous years and suggests establishing clear boundaries between work and personal life, celebrating achievements, seeking support and professional development opportunities, although it points out that the challenge goes beyond individual actions. companies also have a fundamental role to play in preventing burnout by implementing policies and practices that promote a healthy and balanced work environment.

Teaching is an emotionally, cognitively, and socially demanding profession. Teachers must not only meet academic objectives, but also manage conflicts, cater to the diversity of their students, and adapt to constant changes in educational policies. Due to the demanding nature of their work, they are particularly exposed to chronic stressors that can trigger this condition. For this reason, this article aims to conduct a diagnostic study of the incidence of burnout among teachers at the Edwards Deming Corporate University Institute of Technology (ISTUCED) and its consequences on a personal and professional level. Through a review of scientific literature and recent studies, a critical reflection is proposed and recommendations for prevention and intervention in the educational context are put forward.

Due to its impact, understanding this phenomenon is essential to ensure teacher well-being and educational quality.

Materials and methods

A mixed design was used, including documentary research, a survey, and statistical analysis and interpretation of the results.

A selection of academic articles with notable studies on burnout was compiled from reliable databases, and previous texts and research results were reviewed. In addition, reports published by national and international organizations on the phenomenon in question were analyzed.

A critical analysis of the information collected was performed, identifying patterns and trends in the existing literature.

According to , a data collection instrument is any resource, device, or format (paper or digital) used to obtain, record, or store information.

During this research, a structured survey was administered to ISTUCED teachers, which included 10 closed-ended questions related to burnout and its consequences.

The population consisted of 90 active ISTUCED teachers. A sample with a 95% probability (5% error) was selected, resulting in a sample of 41 surveys administered via Google Forms to teachers from various academic areas.

defines a survey as a technique that aims to obtain information provided by a group or sample of subjects about themselves or in relation to a particular topic.

The surveys were drafted with the research objectives in mind. The questions were formulated to obtain specific information about burnout and its impact.

The data obtained from the surveys were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods. Excel was used to perform frequency analyses, tables, and graphs that allow for a clear visualization of the results.

In accordance with the Organic Law on Personal Data Protection in Ecuador, the express, informed, and specific consent of the data subject is required for the processing of personal data for academic research purposes.

The confidentiality and anonymity of the participants were guaranteed, and informed consent was obtained before the surveys were administered, explaining the purpose of the research and the use that would be made of the data collected.

These methods provided a clearer picture of the influence of burnout syndrome on ISTUCED teachers, providing valuable data that will enable the implementation of appropriate strategies to help improve this problem.

Results

A survey was administered to 41 teachers with the aim of exploring the prevalence of symptoms related to Burnout Syndrome. It should be noted that, due to the educational model offered by ISTUCED, teachers work under different statuses: full-time, part-time, and half-time. Therefore, many of the individuals surveyed work in other workplaces, so it must be taken into account that the results do not depend exclusively on variables related to ISTUCED. The main findings are detailed below.

In relation to emotional exhaustion, 41.5% of participants indicated that they feel emotionally exhausted "sometimes," while 34.1% indicated that they feel exhausted 'rarely' and 17.1% experience it "frequently." Only 7.3% said they "never" felt this way at the end of their workday. This indicates that, although it is not a constant phenomenon, exhaustion is present in a significant portion of the respondents.

Regarding motivation for teaching, 56.1% said they "never" felt a loss of interest or motivation, and 24.4% said they 'rarely' felt this way. Only 2.4% reported

feeling "frequently" unmotivated, suggesting that, despite exhaustion, most maintain a positive connection to their teaching work.

Regarding the perception of work overload, 87.8% of teachers stated that their work does not demand more than they can handle, while 12.2% responded affirmatively, implying that the majority do not perceive a disproportion between work demands and their capabilities.

Regarding work-related sleep disturbances, 41.5% responded that they "sometimes" have difficulty sleeping due to work responsibilities. Only 7.3% indicated that this occurs "frequently," while 31.7% said they "never" experience this problem.

Perceptions of job recognition varied: 32.5% said they felt unappreciated "sometimes," 30% "rarely," and 17.5% "frequently," while 20% said they "never" had this perception. This reflects a possible source of job dissatisfaction or frustration and would be an important point of analysis for establishing recommendations for measures to be taken by the institution.

With regard to physical symptoms with no apparent medical cause, such as pain or fatigue, 43.9% of respondents have experienced them "rarely," 17.1% "sometimes," and only 2.4% "frequently." Thirty-six point six percent indicate that they have never experienced physical pain, constant fatigue, or other symptoms with no apparent medical cause. This indicates a moderate presence of somatic symptoms associated with work-related stress.

Regarding irritability and frustration in the work environment, 12.2% responded that they feel this way "sometimes," 41.5% of respondents feel this way "rarely," while 9.8% express feeling frustrated "frequently." Although 36.6% indicate that they have never been overcome by this feeling in the workplace, the statistics from the survey should be taken as a warning sign regarding the emotional climate at work.

Regarding the time available for planning and rest, 78% of teachers consider that they do have enough time, while 22% stated the opposite. This would indicate that workload is not a trigger for this situation in the institution.

A considerable proportion (68.3%) said they had not lost the ability to enjoy their work as before, which can be interpreted as a clear sign that, despite possible emotional exhaustion, many still remain motivated to teach. However, it would be important to follow up on the 31.7% who answered this question affirmatively.

Finally, question 10, about whether they would change professions if they had the opportunity, supports the results of question 9: 78% of respondents would not be willing to do so, which shows a deep vocation for teaching regardless of how difficult it is and the high physical and emotional demands it entails.

The results show moderate to high signs of burnout in a significant proportion of the teachers surveyed, especially in areas such as emotional exhaustion, loss of enjoyment of work, and irritability in the professional environment. Although many still retain their motivation to teach, the accumulated wear and tear seems to influence their overall well-being.

The high proportion of responses stating that they do not feel overwhelmed by work or that they have enough time to plan and rest could be interpreted as a positive sign; however, the contradiction between these results and the high prevalence of emotional and physical symptoms may indicate that stress does not come solely from the objective workload, but also from emotional, relational, and organizational factors.

Particularly striking is the percentage of teachers who report having lost the ability to enjoy their work (31.7%), a crucial aspect of burnout according to Maslach's model. This suggests an urgent need to implement institutional interventions aimed at improving the work environment, offering psychological support, and strengthening professional recognition.

In summary, the results indicate that, although not all teachers are experiencing advanced burnout syndrome, significant risk factors have been identified that could develop negatively if timely intervention is not provided. Prevention and emotional support should be priorities in educational policies aimed at teacher well-being.

Conclusions

Teacher burnout is a complex phenomenon that requires comprehensive attention. The causes are multifactorial and its consequences transcend the personal sphere of the teacher, affecting the education system as a whole.

The implementation of effective and sustained coping strategies is essential to prevent this syndrome and promote a healthy educational environment.

Institutions and policymakers have a key role to play in creating decent working conditions and promoting the well-being of teachers.

According to the results of this research, to address this situation at ISTUCED, individual interventions such as mindfulness, relaxation techniques, psychotherapy, support groups, and training in stress management and time management are suggested. Institutional interventions that could be developed include, as a key point, the promotion of a positive work environment through assertive communication, democratic leadership, and collaboration among teachers, reduction of administrative burdens, and the promotion of teacher well-being and continuing education programs.

As part of the responsibility of the institutions that govern the teaching-learning process, educational policies should aim to recognize and dignify the role of teachers, promote their active participation in decision-making, and provide institutional support for the implementation of innovative pedagogical practices.

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