

# **Burnout and Psychological Well-Being among Public School Teachers**

**Nurfatihah Razali**

*Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities  
University of Technology Malaysia  
Johor Bahru, Johor*

**Mohammad Saipol Mohd Sukor**

*Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities  
University of Technology Malaysia  
Johor Bahru, Johor*

**Abstract :** *The teaching profession is not only tasked with educating students but also burdened with other additional tasks which may lead to burnout and ultimately disrupt the psychological well-being among teachers. This study aims to identify the level of burnout and psychological well-being and to identify the relationship between burnout and psychological well-being among secondary school teachers in Johor. A total of 202 teachers participated in this study through simple random sampling. Maslach Burnout Inventory and Psychological Well-Being Scale were used to measure the variables. Descriptive and inferential statistical methods such as Pearson Correlation were used to analyse the quantitative data. The results show that there is a moderate level of burnout and psychological well-being among teachers. The study found that emotional exhaustion and depersonalization have a significant negative relationship with psychological well-being. Whereas, personal achievement has a significant and positive relationship with psychological well-being among secondary school teachers.*

**Keywords :** *Burnout, emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, personal accomplishment, and psychological well-being.*

---

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

Burnout among teachers has long been a significant issue in the teaching profession<sup>1</sup>. A teacher is an individual who has a responsibility as an instructor or educator where this individual becomes one of the sources to seek knowledge for others<sup>2</sup>. Due to the important role of an educator in society, a teacher is prone to experience stress which may lead to burnout as a result of prolonged stress<sup>3</sup>. Burnout includes the feeling of tiredness and often having difficulty getting enough sleep<sup>4</sup>. The three main aspects of burnout are emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and lack of personal achievement. This condition could negatively impact psychological well-being because the excessive burden experienced by individuals on their work will increase the level of emotional fatigue and decrease psychological well-being<sup>5</sup>.

Psychological well-being is one of the important core features of mental health which portray a positive psychological condition. It may be defined as a tendency to feel enjoyment, pleasure, meaning, fulfillment, happiness, as well as resilience towards any aspect of life<sup>6</sup>. In such a case, the psychological well-being of a teacher is very important as it relates to the atmosphere and environment in the workplace. Low psychological well-being will decrease teacher's focus and commitment in carrying out their daily tasks. This condition also will lead to a significant deficit in terms of work productivity and will directly affect the quality of education<sup>7</sup>.

Many past researchers predicted that the teaching profession is at high risk of experiencing mental disorders and work stress compared to other professions where this will indirectly result in disturbed psychological conditions due to high burnout<sup>8</sup>. However, the empirical studies which have proven the association between burnout and psychological well-being are still limited, especially in the teaching profession<sup>9</sup>. Most of the past studies focused more on other research settings such as the intensive care unit workers<sup>10</sup> and nursing students<sup>11</sup>.

Although some studies tend to explore the relationship of burnout to other variables such as job satisfaction<sup>12</sup> and low organizational commitment<sup>13</sup>, but there still is a lack of study to uncover the nature of relationship between burnout and psychological well-being. The lack of previous studies examining the association between these two variables especially among middle school teachers depict the need for empirical studies to increase the understanding of the variables in the teaching profession. Therefore, this study aims to

identify the level of burnout and psychological well-being and to identify the relationship between these variables among secondary school teachers in Johor which is one of the most developed states in Malaysia.

## **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Burnout is a syndrome that occurs to individuals who experience extreme fatigue while doing tasks<sup>14</sup>. The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) model was one of the prominent models that explain burnout based on three dimensions namely; emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and personal achievement. According to this model, the main aspect of burnout syndrome is the increased feeling of emotional exhaustion. It is a condition characterized by lack of emotional resources, as a result employees will no longer be able to give their best in doing their job<sup>14</sup>. Next is depersonalization which refers to a negative, cynical attitude and feeling towards others. The development of this dimension is related to the emotional exhaustion which eventually disturbs an employee's social connection with others in a workplace. Lastly, the reduction of personal achievement refers to the tendency to evaluate oneself negatively, especially in terms of one's job<sup>14</sup>.

According to this theory, burnout is an individual's stressful experience in the context of complex social relationships and it involves a person's concept of himself and others<sup>14</sup>. The important point of this three-dimensional model is that it clearly places the individual's experience of stress in a social context. The centrality of relationships in the workplace, whether relationships with customers, colleagues or supervisors are always at the heart of the problem. This relationship is the source of both emotional stress and appreciation. This way burnout can be seen as one of the factors that predict the psychological condition of an employee in the workplace<sup>15</sup>.

The concept of psychological well-being can be understood based on The Six Factors Model of Psychological Well-Being (PWB) by Ryff. Ryff synthesized several well-known positive psychological health concepts derived from several theories developed by earlier researchers such as Erikson's psychosocial stages, Bühler's basic life tendencies, Neugarten's personality changes, Maslow's self-actualization, Allport's maturity, Roger's fully functioning individual, Jung's individuation and Jahoda's positive psychological health. Ryff's PWB consists of six components including self-acceptance, positive relationships with others, autonomy, mastery of the environment, purpose in life and personal development<sup>16</sup>.

Psychological well-being is an individual's attempt to realize their talents and is conceptualized as a multidimensional consisting of six dimensions, namely autonomy, mastery over the environment, personal growth, positive relationships with others, purpose in life and self-acceptance<sup>16,15</sup>. Autonomy, is a feeling of freedom and self-determination in the form of actions and thoughts, while mastery over the environment, refers to the feeling of being powerful and efficient in managing and controlling external activities in order to benefit from the opportunities around. Next, personal growth is continuous development and gaining new experiences and can realize individual abilities. As for the positive relationships with others, it is the birth of feelings of empathy, love and intimacy in relationships. Last but not least, the purpose of life refers to the individual's goal in life and self-acceptance is a positive attitude towards oneself in the past as well as the present.

Basically, workplace values and individual personal values have implications related to burnout and well-being<sup>17</sup>. Individuals may align their values with their jobs so as to increase motivation and well-being and indirectly reduce the risk of burnout. A study conducted among Romanian teachers found that teachers who have a lower score in psychological well-being are reported to experience high levels of fatigue and depersonalization and also lack of motivation in personal achievement<sup>15</sup>. Other studies among teachers in South Africa also found that there is a strong negative correlation between burnout's dimensions of depersonalization and psychological well-being<sup>18</sup>. Recent studies also suggest the significant correlations between the dimension of burnout and psychological well being in various settings and populations<sup>19,20</sup>. Based on the results of previous studies regarding the relationship between these two variables and their dimension. This study will test several hypotheses as follows:

1. Hypothesis 1: There is a significant positive relationship between burnout and psychological well-being among High School teachers
2. Hypothesis 2: There is a significant negative relationship between the dimensions of emotional exhaustion and psychological well-being among Secondary School teachers.
3. Hypothesis 3: There is a significant negative relationship between the dimension of depersonalization and psychological well-being among Secondary School teachers.
4. Hypothesis 4: There is a significant positive relationship between the dimensions of personal achievement and psychological well-being among Secondary School teachers.

## **III. METHODOLOGY**

This study uses correlational and cross-sectional research design. The research population are middle school teachers at Pontian, Johor. The teaching profession was chosen as the subject of research due to the fact that the study of burnouts is an important indicator to certain stakeholders such as the Ministry of Education in

Malaysia as it is a vital element in education which needs to be managed and reduced efficiently<sup>21</sup>. The estimated population was 1242 middle school teachers and the sample size required should be more than 200 respondents<sup>22</sup>. After the questionnaire distribution, a total of 202 respondents participated in this study in which the samples were selected using simple random sampling. There are two instruments used to collect the quantitative data for each of the variables. Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) was used to measure the level of burnout of respondents and the Psychological Well Being Scale (PWBS) to measure the level of psychological well-being. MBI contains three dimensions namely emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and personal achievement and the total number of items are 22 items. MBI has a high reliability with Croanbach's coefficient alpha value ranging from 0.79 to 0.90.

Meanwhile, PWBS contains 18 items that have been shortened from 120 items asking about the respondent's feeling and experience towards their life. The reliability of this instrument is high with Cronbach's alpha value of 0.92. Both instruments were measured by using 5-point Likert's scale which are 1 'never', 2 'rarely', 3 'sometimes', 4 'quite often' and 5 'always'. As for data analysis, the current study uses descriptive statistics such as mean, frequency and percentage to measure the level of burnout and psychological well-being. Whereas inferential statistics, namely Pearson's correlation analysis, was used to identify the relationship between burnout and psychological well-being.

**IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

Majority of the respondents in this study are female teachers (70%) with ages below 30 years old (40%) followed by 51 to 60 year old (32%) and the rest are ages between 41 to 50 (28%) years old. It was found that most respondents have been working as a teacher for less than 10 years (42%) followed by 16 to 20 years (32%) and 11 to 15 years (26%). Table 1 shows the overall mean score of burnout experienced by middle school teachers. The overall mean score value is at moderate level (m=2.29) which means that the teachers experience moderate level of burnout in the workplace. The findings of the study shows that although the majority of the respondents have a moderate level of emotional exhaustion (57%), low level of depersonalization (64%) and high level of personal achievement (63%), there were still some respondents who experience high level of emotional exhaustion (4%) and low level of personal achievement (4%). Furthermore, the overall mean score of psychological well-being is (m=2.82) which indicates a high level of psychological well-being among middle school teachers. The finding shows that a total of 166 respondents have a high level of psychological well-being, whereas 36 respondents show a moderate level of psychological well-being.

Table 1: Level of Burnout and Psychological Well-being

Variable	Mean	SD	Level		
			Low (%)	Moderate (%)	High (%)
Emotional Exhaustion	2.62	.618	78 (39)	116 (57)	8 (4)
Depersonalization	1.99	.670	126 (62)	76 (38)	-
Personal Achievement	2.11	.547	8 (4)	74 (36)	120 (60)
Overall Burnout	2.29	.497	-	194 (96)	8 (4)
Psychological Well-being	2.821	.383	-	36 (17.8)	166 (82.2)

Note: f-frequency, %-percentage, SD-standard deviation

The current study found that majority of middle school teachers have a moderate level of burnout. These findings indicate moderate levels of stressors at the workplace such as workload and job demand<sup>6</sup>. As a result, a lot of the respondents give moderate scores (scale 3-sometimes) on the items to measure burnout. Most of the respondents stated that they sometimes feel emotionally disturb due to their job and tend to feel exhausted even before going to work. These findings are consistent with previous studies which found that the teaching profession has a moderate risk of experiencing burnout through emotional exhaustion, as teachers tend to face high job demands and at the same time they need to deal with student's problematic attitudes in school<sup>23</sup>.

Although the majority of teachers have a high level of personal achievement and a low level of depersonalization, there are still some teachers who have a low level of personal achievement which means they

tend to feel burnout in the workplace. These teachers feel indifferent to what happened to some of their students and often feel that they haven't achieved anything important in their life. It shows that being a teacher doesn't mean the person has a good personal achievement for some teachers.

Next, the results of the study show that middle school teachers have a high level of psychological well-being. Based on the findings, it can be stated that teachers can control their emotions well when facing a problem at school and have a positive view and perception towards many aspects in their life. It is in line with previous research which found that a high level of psychological well-being was experienced among the best quality teachers in a middle school<sup>24</sup>. A large number of respondents in this study stated that they can face problems involving emotions calmly at work. For them, the problem they face is a process of learning, change and growth in their lives to train themselves to become a more mature person in dealing with a problem.

Some teachers feel that they are the type of people who sometimes surrender to social pressure when doing something in their life. This finding is partially consistent with previous study stating that some teachers may have a low level of psychological well-being<sup>17</sup>. This may be due to the uncontrolled external factors such as facing the new social norm with a blended working schedule in an endemic era nowadays. This scenario may affect the level of psychological well-being to some extent among teachers who need to spend working time and adjust their teaching and learning methods at different workplace settings (online and face to face teaching method).

Table 2 shows the result from correlation analysis on the relationship between burnout and psychological well-being. Overall, it was found that there is a negative relationship between the burnout and psychological well-being ( $r = -0.503, p < 0.01$ ). The significant and moderate level of relationship between these two variables means that the hypothesis of this study is accepted. Further analysis shows a significant and negative relationship between the dimensions of emotional exhaustion ( $r = -0.320, p < 0.01$ ) and depersonalization ( $r = -0.406, p < 0.01$ ) with psychological well-being among. Whereas, personal achievement was found to have a positive relationship with psychological well-being among teachers ( $r = 0.689, p < 0.01$ ).

Table 2: Relationship between Burnout and Psychological Well-being

Dimension	Psychological Well-being	
	r	p-value
Emotional Exhaustion	-.320**	.000
Depersonalization	-.406**	.000
Personal Achievement	.689**	.000
Overall Burnout	-.503**	.000

Note: \*\*correlation is significant at level of  $p < 0.01$  (2-tailed)

This study proves the negative and significant relationship between burnout and psychological well-being. The increase of burnout were associated with the decrease of psychological well-being. Specifically, the dimensions of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization are negatively related to psychological well-being. This means that the increase of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization are related to the decrease of psychological well-being. On the other hand, the dimension of personal achievement is positively related to psychological well-being which means that the increase of personal achievement are related to the increase of psychological well-being among teachers.

The results obtained from this study are consistent with previous studies which found a strong and negative correlation between burnout and psychological well-being<sup>18,17</sup>. The increase in burnout characterized by high emotional exhaustion, high depersonalization and low personal achievement is related to the lower psychological well-being of the respondents and vice versa. Most teachers who are emotionally exhausted and lack energy at the workplace tend to be highly influenced by social pressure, lack of confidence and are not satisfied with their social relationships. Whereas, teachers who perceive that they have achieved many meaningful things in their life will tend to be more calm and able to manage their work efficiently. This may be due to the background of the respondents who are mostly teachers aged between 51 and 60 years with 16 to 20 years of teaching experience which are likely to influence the result of this study. It can be said that there is a link between burnout and psychological well-being based on the experience of the respondents. These groups of teachers were more likely enjoy their conversations with their colleagues and did not feel high pressure working with other people.

## V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study uses a quantitative data collection method where the data is measured based on the individual response to the given questionnaire. Therefore the findings are quite limited on the item in the questionnaires. Future researchers are recommended to use mix method research design in order to gain more data regarding the variables. Other than that, the current study also focuses on the relationship between burnout and psychological well-being. It is suggested that future researchers identify the influence of burnout on psychological well-being in order to provide a more in depth explanation and to fill in the research gaps regarding the causal relationship between the two variables<sup>18</sup>.

In addition, the results of this study will add value to scientific knowledge which can help further develop burnout theories such as the Maslach Burnout Inventory and also the concept of psychological well-being. Finally, the results of this study also contribute to school organizations to better plan school achievements in the future. By having effective and productive teachers, the school can produce many excellent students in the future. In this regard, the school organization plays an important role in ensuring that teachers do not experience burnout while doing their tasks. The school's initiatives such as providing motivation and applying positive emotions can help teachers avoid themselves experiencing burnout and can maintain positive psychological well-being.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Antoniou, A.-S., Ploumpi, A., & Ntalla, M. (2013). Occupational stress and professional burnout in teachers of primary and secondary education: The role of coping strategies. *Psychology*, 4(03), 349.
- [2] Dewan, K. (2005). Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka. *Kuala Lumpur*.
- [3] Jarmas, B., & Raed, Z. (2018). Stress and burnout among lecturers and pedagogical instructors in colleges of education. *European Journal of Education Studies*.
- [4] Heinemann, L. V., & Heinemann, T. (2017). Burnout research: Emergence and scientific investigation of a contested diagnosis. *Sage Open*, 7(1), 2158244017697154.
- [5] Kareaga, A., Ayestarán, S., & Smith, J. (2009). Assessment of burnout and psychological wellbeing among health professionals in the Basque Country. *Psychology in Spain, ISSN 1137-9685, N° 13, 2009, pags. 62-71, 13*.
- [6] Tang, Y. Y., Tang, R., & Gross, J. J. (2019). Promoting psychological well-being through an evidence-based mindfulness training program. *Frontiers in human neuroscience*, 13, 237.
- [7] Damásio, B. F., de Melo, R. L. P., & da Silva, J. P. (2013). Meaning in life, psychological well-being and quality of life in teachers. *Paidéia*, 23(54), 73-82.
- [8] Kidger, J., Brockman, R., Tilling, K., Campbell, R., Ford, T., Araya, R., . . . Gunnell, D. (2016). Teachers' wellbeing and depressive symptoms, and associated risk factors: A large cross sectional study in English secondary schools. *Journal of affective disorders*, 192, 76-82.
- [9] Farrell, S. M., Moir, F., Molodynski, A., & Bhugra, D. (2019). Psychological well being, burnout and substance use amongst medical students in New Zealand. *International Review of Psychiatry*, 31(7-8), 630-636. doi: 10.1080/09540261.2019.1681204
- [10] Garcia, F. E., Cova-Solar, F., Bustos-Torres, F., & Reyes-Perez, E. (2018). Burnout and psychological well-being of personnel of intensive care units. *Duazary*, 15(1), 23-38. doi: 10.21676/2389783x.2101
- [11] Rios-Risquez, M. I., Garcia-Izquierdo, M., Sabuco-Tebar, E. D., Carrillo-Garcia, C., & Solano-Ruiz, C. (2018). Connections between academic burnout, resilience, and psychological well-being in nursing students: A longitudinal study. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 74(12), 2777-2784. doi: 10.1111/jan.13794
- [12] Chiron, B., Michinov, E., Olivier-Chiron, E., Laffon, M., & Rusch, E. (2010). Job Satisfaction, Life Satisfaction and Burnout in French Anaesthetists. *Journal of health psychology*, 15, 948-958. doi: 10.1177/1359105309360072
- [13] Akdemir, Ö. A. (2019). The Effect of Teacher Burnout on Organizational Commitment in Turkish Context. *Journal of Education and Training Studies*, 7(4), 171-179.
- [14] Maslach, C., Jackson, S. E., Leiter, M. P., Schaufeli, W. B., & Schwab, R. L. (1986). *Maslach burnout inventory* (Vol. 21): Consulting psychologists press Palo Alto, CA.
- [15] Bentea, C. C. (2017). Teacher Self-Efficacy, Teacher Burnout and Psychological Well-Being. In E. Soare & C. Langa (Eds.), *Edu World 7th International Conference* (Vol. 23, pp. 1128-+).
- [16] Ryff, C., & Singer, B. (1996). Psychological Well-Being: Meaning, Measurement, and Implications for Psychotherapy Research. *Psychotherapy and psychosomatics*, 65, 14-23. doi: 10.1159/000289026
- [17] Veage, S., Ciarrochi, J., Deane, F. P., Andresen, R., Oades, L. G., & Crowe, T. P. (2014). Value congruence, importance and success and in the workplace: Links with well-being and burnout amongst mental health practitioners. *Journal of Contextual Behavioral Science*, 3(4), 258-264.

- [18] Vazi, M., Ruiter, R. A., Van den Borne, B., Martin, G., Dumont, K., & Reddy, P. (2011). Indicators of subjective and psychological well-being as correlates of teacher burnout in the Eastern Cape public schools, South Africa. *International Journal of Education Administration Research and Policy Studies*, 3(10), 160-169.
- [19] Wei, H., Dorn, A., Hutto, H., Webb Corbett, R., Haberstroh, A., & Larson, K. (2021). Impacts of nursing student burnout on psychological well-being and academic achievement. *Journal of Nursing Education*, 60(7), 369-376.
- [20] Jeon, L., Buettner, C. K., & Grant, A. A. (2018). Early childhood teachers' psychological well-being: Exploring potential predictors of depression, stress, and emotional exhaustion. *Early education and development*, 29(1), 53-69.
- [21] Ismail, A. A., Sulaiman, T., & Roslan, S. (2020). Models of relationship between emotional, spiritual, physical and social intelligence, resilience and burnout among high school teachers. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, 8(1), 1-7.
- [22] Krejcie, R. V., & Morgan, D. W. (1970). Determining sample size for research activities. *Educational and psychological measurement*, 30(3), 607-610.
- [23] Brunsting, N. C., Sreckovic, M. A., & Lane, K. L. (2014). Special education teacher burnout: A synthesis of research from 1979 to 2013. *Education and treatment of children*, 681-711.
- [24] Sisask, M., Värnik, P., Värnik, A., Apter, A., Balazs, J., Balint, M., Cosman, D. (2014). Teacher satisfaction with school and psychological well-being affects their readiness to help children with mental health problems. *Health Education Journal*, 73(4), 382-393.