

## DIFFERENCES BY GENDER IN THE EXPERIENCE OF BURNOUT AMONG EDUCATORS OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

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Burnout of the educators has become extremely important topic in the scientific society for the past few years, especially, since the pandemic caused by Covid-19 occurred. Since the 1970s, when the burnout arose on the scientific agenda, educators were stated as one of the professions highly associated with burnout. However, in different studies, researchers argue about whether burnout is related to the gender of the educators. The goal of the research is to determine if gender of the educators from different universities in Europe has a link with such symptoms of burnout as exhaustion, depersonalisation and reduced accomplishment. The objectives of this study are to analyse recent scientific findings on burnout and its relation to gender, as well as analyse data from the authors' survey to find out if symptoms of burnout are related to the gender of educators from Europe. Research methods include a literature review and survey of educators from different higher education institutions. For survey data analysis, the following indicators have been used: descriptive statistics, testing of statistical hypotheses with Mann-Whitney non-parametric test and t-test. The results of the study show that there is statistically significant difference in relation of the gender to the burnout symptoms within the educators of the higher education institutions in Europe, as male educators demonstrate a higher level of such burnout symptoms as exhaustion and reduced personal accomplishment, as well as male educators show higher willingness to change their professional field due to exhaustion.

**Keywords:** *Burnout, educators, gender, higher education institutions.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

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Since the 1970s, the concept of burnout has been introduced to society, and extensive research has been conducted to highlight the importance of understanding this phenomenon, reducing its risks and preventing its rise. However, in the past year, the topic of burnout has become even more crucial due to the pandemic caused by COVID-19, which has led to remote work and erased the boundary between personal and work life. This has affected educators of higher education institutions, who have had to adjust to remote work and the absence of scientific and methodological conferences and networking events, which are an important part of successful academic staff development in sharing findings and ideas. However, despite the extensive research conducted there is ongoing scientific discussion in the scientific society on different aspects of burnout, based on gender, age, occupation and other aspects.

Gender has been a topic of research in relation to burnout, with different opinions from researchers. Some argue that females are more affected by burnout than men [1], while others state that there is no significant difference between genders [2]. However, it can be debated that women may be more affected by burnout due to their multiple responsibilities outside of work, such as daily home duties.

The goal of this paper is to investigate whether there is a difference between male and female educators of higher education

institutions in terms of experiencing burnout symptoms, given ongoing debate in the scientific literature. The research involves results of analysis of recent scientific findings published in academic papers worldwide on burnout and its relation to gender, as those aspects are analysed in detail by many researchers. For empirical research, a survey of educators at higher education institutions has been conducted to examine the link between burnout and gender. Several aspects in the survey have been evaluated on a scale from 1 to 10 to obtain in-depth information on respondents' attitude and thoughts. Questionnaire, created by Julija Mironova, has been placed on the QuestionPro survey tool and distributed via email to the educators of higher education institutions. In total, the authors of the study have analysed answers of 1,601 respondents.

The paper provides research findings to contribute to the existing literature on burnout and gender by shedding light on the experiences of educators of higher education institutions and providing insights into how they can better cope with burnout. An understanding if there is a difference between gender and its relation to burnout would help the management of higher education institutions to adapt strategies for well-being of the educators to a specific organisation to prevent burnout within educators.

## 2. CHARACTERISTICS OF BURNOUT IN EDUCATION

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Teaching is a profession commonly associated with a high level of occupational stress. Extensive research has been con-

ducted to investigate the factors that impact the daily life of educators and contribute to the development of burnout.

One of the foremost contributors to the field of burnout research is C. Maslach, who provided a seminal definition of burnout and created the widely used Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) [3]. According to the MBI, burnout is characterised by three main components: emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and reduced personal accomplishment. Over time, the MBI has been adapted and modified by researchers to better suit the needs of different professions. General versions, as the Human Service Survey (MBI-HSS), MBI for educators (MBI-ES), and MBI for medical personnel (MBI-HSS-MP), have been developed. Overall, the work of Maslach has been crucial in providing a framework for understanding and measuring burnout, and the ongoing adaptations of the MBI continue to be instrumental in identifying and addressing burnout in various professional contexts.

In 2020, researchers utilised the MBI-ES to assess levels of burnout among teachers in Thailand. Their results indicated that many teachers were experiencing mental health problems and burnout symptoms [4]. Moreover, recent studies have highlighted the particularly demanding work environment that educators face, which can result in chronic stress and the development of burnout symptoms [5]. In fact, research has shown that professors who are overwhelmed with excessive work responsibilities are more likely to experience high levels of depersonalisation and emotional exhaustion, both key components of burnout [6].

Across the world, immense research has been conducted on factors influencing burnout, and it has been found that role conflict is one of the factors that can influence burnout, as evidenced in research conducted in China [7]. Collaboration among higher education academic staff has been observed to

be a mitigating factor in reducing burnout and is viewed as collegial and engaging [8]. Improvement in teachers' working conditions has also been identified as a factor that can reduce burnout and depersonalisation [9].

Implementation of information technologies in the daily lives of academic staff has been identified as an effective way to avoid burnout. The study [10] emphasised the importance of colleges and universities paying attention to this necessity to reduce the complexity of work, improve work efficacy, and avoid burnout by implementing informational technologies in daily life. Moreover, personal traits of educators are also important to consider when implementing strategies to avoid burnout, such as taking work home, which can cause burnout [11]. However, many educators claim that this is their way of working and provides them with extra hours. Professional development is also one of the factors that positively affects the educators' efficacy, as gaining new knowledge is positively related to efficacy [12].

Burnout is strongly related to the personality of academic staff, as it is recommended to build a sustainable work environment to prevent burnout within the academic staff [13]. Evaluation of the educators' work needs a more holistic and sustainable approach, not only quantitative measures, as teachers play a unique role in education. A more qualitative approach would lead to avoiding stress among the educators, which is linked with the evaluation of their work [14]. Additionally, self-efficacy and affective organisational commitment were identified as important factors that could transmit to one another to prevent burnout and avoid high employee turnover among academic staff at higher education institutions in Pakistan [15].

Teachers, who work with students with

learning disabilities in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, show a high level of emotional exhaustion, despite the efforts of the Education Department of Saudi Arabia to optimise working conditions of the teachers. However, to avoid exhaustion of educators, psychological, social, and professional support should be organised [16]. In a related study, authors identified student behaviour and attitudes as a significant factor that influences the teaching experience of academic staff, which ultimately affects their well-being [17]. Specifically, a lack of motivation and unwillingness to acquire knowledge were found to be significant sources of stress for teachers. These findings suggest that interventions aimed at improving the learning environment and student attitudes could help reduce teacher burnout and enhance their job satisfaction. One more important aspect that influences teachers' attitude towards work is support and respect from the management side for decision-making and independent thinking [18]. STEM faculty often face additional challenges, such as growing class sizes and increased pressure to ensure students perform well on professional entrance exams like the MCAT, DAT, or PCAT [19].

However, not only educators were concerned about the stress caused by online education during the pandemic, known as Covid-19. Parents of students stated that educators during the online education process should provide more flexibility for parents, as well as that roles of all stakeholders should be defined [20]. However, the education process during the pandemic also faced positive changes, such as digi-

tal transformation in adult education. Digitalisation of education facilitated sustainable development of accessible education for potential learners in the rural areas and regions [21]. Developing diverse pedagogical competencies, skills, and specialised knowledge poses demanding study requirements that STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) educators confront. STEM education is a uniquely demanding and challenging field. Recent research conducted in Croatia has stated that educators show a moderate level of burnout, and that ultimately reduces the quality of the study process [22]. An ability to regulate emotions is important in the education field, and it is especially crucial in STEM topics, which promotes more successful integration with students and reduces teacher dropouts, and plays a key role in mediating the link between well-being and stress [23].

Educators are commonly associated with high levels of stress due to their significant responsibility in facilitating student knowledge acquisition. The global development of higher education has placed an immense pressure on educators, particularly at higher education institutions, where additional tasks such as research, academic work, and innovations add to their already substantial workload. Burnout is a widespread phenomenon among various professions, particularly those that involve extensive interpersonal interactions, and educators are no exception. The combination of excessive workload and close contact with many people in the higher education environment creates an environment where burnout can pose a serious threat to the well-being of educators.

### **3. BURNOUT IN RELATION TO GENDER**

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There is an ongoing scientific discussion about the relationship between gender

and burnout, and many factors have been proposed as potential influences or protec-

tive factors. Studies have explored various aspects of work and personal life to determine if they are linked to burnout symptoms in educators, and the findings regarding the relationship between gender and burnout are inconsistent.

Several studies have found that females are more susceptible to burnout and exhibit more visible signs of burnout than males [24]–[29]. For example, women at STEM faculties reported less access to the information they needed for their jobs and greater interpersonal conflict, both of which were associated with higher job burnout [30]. Commitment to work is especially important for women, in the context of continuous stress that leads to burnout [31]. One potential explanation for this difference is the higher workload women typically carry, which is often unrelated to their professional duties. Women are often expected to fulfil family-based duties, such as caring for children and managing household responsibilities, which can increase their overall workload.

However, some recent studies have found that men experience higher levels of burnout than women [32]–[34]. There might be several possible explanations why men might have higher signs of burnout than women – pressure from society to take care about their family, so they are working extra hours to provide enough financial

support for the family. Additionally, men might have less social support places that woman have, to help them coping with stress, which is leading to burnout. Moreover, some authors suggest that there is no significant difference in burnout symptoms based on gender [2], [35]–[38].

Interestingly, recent research has found that women experience more frequent gender discrimination than men, which can be considered a predictor of burnout [39]. These findings suggest that gender differences in burnout symptoms are complex and require further investigation to better understand the underlying factors.

The topic of gender and burnout symptoms has generated a great deal of debate and research, with some studies reporting contradictory findings. In light of this, the goal of this study is to explore whether there is a significant relationship between gender and burnout symptoms of educators working at higher education institutions. Through a rigorous examination of this issue, the study intends to contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between gender and symptoms of burnout, with the ultimate goal of promoting the well-being and resilience of educators in this important and demanding field.

## 4. METHODOLOGY

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To achieve the research goal, the authors of the paper developed the survey, consisting of two parts. In the demographic part placed in the second part of the survey, the respondent profile questions were included, while in the main part – questions related to the burnout. However, it should be noted

that burnout itself was not measured in the research, as the authors asked questions related to it, but no measurement scale was used.

The structure of the survey is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Structure of the Survey

Part	Question	Type of the question; responses
A	Attitudes related to burnout and organisational culture aspects	18 statements with multiple evaluation scales
B	Respondent profile	18 statements with multiple evaluation scales (gender, age, teaching experience, type of represented institution, country)

**Source:** The authors' calculations based on the survey created and conducted by Jūlija Mironova.

Survey was created by J. Mironova, tested in pilot survey, and for survey implementation it was placed on survey platform QuestionPro and distributed via emails to the educators of higher education institutions. In total, 1,601 educators were surveyed.

To reach the goal, the authors analysed survey data using SPSS for indicators of descriptive statistics, cross-tabulations, testing of statistical hypotheses with chi-square test and correlation analysis.

## 5. EMPIRICAL RESEARCH RESULT

Educators from different countries in Europe participated in the survey. Distribu-

tion of the respondents by country is presented in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Distribution of the Respondents by Country

Country	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent	
Valid	Latvia	231	14.4	14.5	14.5
	Lithuania	220	13.7	13.8	28.2
	Estonia	86	5.4	5.4	33.6
	Ukraine	85	5.3	5.3	38.9
	Other	67	4.2	4.2	43.1
	Bulgaria	13	.8	.8	44.0
	Finland	233	14.6	14.6	58.5
	Poland	57	3.6	3.6	62.1
	The Netherlands	25	1.6	1.6	63.7
	Denmark	155	9.7	9.7	73.4
	Italy	261	16.3	16.3	89.7
	Sweden	25	1.6	1.6	91.3
	The Czech Republic	24	1.5	1.5	92.8
	Norway	39	2.4	2.4	95.2
	France	19	1.2	1.2	96.4
	Brazil	12	.7	.8	97.2
	The UK	18	1.1	1.1	98.3
	Croatia	6	.4	.4	98.7
	The USA	21	1.3	1.3	100.0
Total	1597	99.8	100.0		
Missing	4	.2			
Total	1601	100.0			

**Source:** The authors' calculations based on the survey created and conducted by Jūlija Mironova.

Table 2 presents data on the distribution of respondents, all of whom are academic staff of higher education institutions. A total of 1,597 valid responses were collected, with four missing responses, for a total of 1,601 respondents. The distribution of respondents shows that the countries with the highest number of respondents are Italy, with 261 respondents, Finland with 233 respondents, and Latvia with 231 respondents. Lithuania had 220 respondents, while Denmark had 155 respondents. Other countries such as Estonia (86 respondents) and Ukraine (85 respondents) also contributed notable numbers of responses. Smaller representations came from such countries as Poland (57 respondents), Norway (39 respondents), and France (19 respondents). Additionally, some countries had very few respondents, such as Bulgaria (13 respondents), Brazil (12 respondents), and Croatia (6 respondents).

Respondents were asked to answer the question “*Have you ever experienced following burnout symptoms?*”, selecting several aspects: Exhaustion (feels like a physical and emotional energy level is extremely low at most of the time and person might think “I don’t know how much longer I can continue working like this”); Depersonalisation (detached or indifferent attitude to work, a person might have cynical behaviour, can be expressed in unprofessional comments addressed to colleagues, blaming them and students); Reduced personal accomplishment (a person negatively evaluates the worth of the work, begins to doubt meaning of the work). The answers were evaluated taking into account the gender. Confidentiality of responses was guaranteed, and all responses were to be evaluated only in updated way.

According to the data analysis, 1,169 respondents (i.e., 73 % of the total number)

reported experiencing exhaustion, while 423 (27 %) indicated they had not experienced this symptom. **526 respondents** (34 %) reported experiencing depersonalisation, while 1 044 (66 %) stated that they had not experienced such a symptom. 933 respondents (59 %) reported experiencing reduced personal accomplishment, while 649 (41 %) did not. The data indicate that exhaustion is the most common symptom of burnout among academic staff of higher education institutions, with nearly three-quarters of respondents affected.

Two specific hypotheses were formulated to test difference within gender of the educators and aspects related to burnout. The first hypothesis was formulated based on the results of Torres et al. (2021), Fiorilli et al. (2022), Nadkarni (2022), Artz & Kaya (2022), Khan et al. (2022), revealing that females were more susceptible to burnout and exhibited more visible signs of burnout compared to males, and the findings of the Institute of Stress, maintaining that the total economic impact of stress on employees in the USA was 300 billion of dollars, influenced by such factors as turnover, diminished productivity, increased mental costs and absenteeism, leading to a conclusion that burnout is also interrelated to the intentions to change the work field.

H1: There is a statistically significant difference between the gender of the educators and the experience of burnout symptoms, as female educators are more affected by burnout than male educators.

H2: There is a statistically significant difference between willingness to change the field because of exhaustion between genders.

The burnout dimensions in relation to gender were analysed, and the Mann-Whitney non-parametric test was used to test H1.

The p-value for exhaustion is < 0.001, indicating a statistically significant

difference in exhaustion levels between genders. The higher mean rank for male respondents (787.19 vs. 696.90) suggests that male respondents experience higher levels of exhaustion than female respondents.

The p-value for depersonalisation is 0.918, which is not statistically significant. There is no significant statistical difference in depersonalisation levels between genders. The similar mean ranks (730.50 vs. 728.65) further indicate that depersonalisation levels are similar across both groups.

The p-value for reduced personal accomplishment is  $< 0.001$ , indicating a statistically significant difference in reduced personal accomplishment between genders. Male respondents have a higher mean rank

(777.00) than female respondents (699.00), suggesting that men report feeling more reduced in personal accomplishment than women.

Based on the results of the data analysis, the hypothesis was rejected, as gender differences were confirmed within feelings of exhaustion and reduced personal accomplishment, where male respondents were showing a higher level of those symptoms, while the depersonalisation level was similar across both genders.

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to examine gender differences in intentions to change the work field because of exhaustion, thereby testing H2. Results of the independent samples t-test are represented in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Main Indicators: t-test on Average Evaluations by Gender on Changing the Work Field due to Work Exhaustion

Analysed aspects	Equality of variances	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Standard Error of Difference
Changing of the work field due to exhaustion	assumed	7.679	0.006	4.450	1438	$<.001$	.11689	0.02627
	not assumed			4.453	1405.084	$<.001$	.11689	0.02625

**Source:** The survey of academic staff of higher education institutions conducted by the authors, 2024. n=1601

There is a significant difference between men and women regarding their willingness to change their field of work due to exhaustion, with men being more likely

to consider changing their profession than women. Based on the data analysis, the second hypothesis was proven.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

The phenomenon of burnout, despite many years of research, is still on the scientific agenda, especially within such professions as teaching. It is especially important in the STEM fields, where education is widely recognised as a particularly challenging field

due to its rigorous content, rapid technological advancements, and high performance expectations placed on both students and educators. However, there is still scientific discussion on who is more affected by burnout, female or male professionals?

The study has investigated the relationship between gender and burnout among educators at higher education institutions, with a particular focus on three key burnout symptoms: exhaustion, depersonalisation, and reduced personal accomplishment.

The empirical results drawn from a survey of 1,601 educators from various countries in Europe and beyond have revealed several important insights. First, exhaustion has been identified as the most prevalent symptom of burnout, reported by 73 % of respondents. Reduced personal accomplishment is also commonly experienced (59 %), while depersonalisation is less frequent (34 %).

Contrary to some earlier findings suggesting women are more affected by burnout, this study has found statistically significant gender differences indicating that male educators report higher levels of exhaustion and reduced personal accomplishment than their female colleagues. No significant gender difference has been observed in terms of depersonalisation, suggesting that certain aspects of burnout may affect educators similarly, regardless of gender.

Moreover, a statistically significant difference has been observed between men and women in their willingness to change their professional field due to exhaustion, with men more likely to consider such a shift. This highlights the potential long-

term consequences of burnout, including career attrition, particularly among male educators.

These findings challenge some commonly held assumptions in the literature and contribute new evidence to the ongoing debate about gender differences in burnout. The results underscore the importance of developing gender-sensitive strategies to manage and prevent burnout in higher education. Tailored support systems, mental health resources, and workload management interventions are crucial to safeguarding educator well-being and ensuring a sustainable academic staff.

Ultimately, the study emphasises the need for higher education institutions to recognise burnout as a serious occupational hazard and to adopt proactive organisational measures that account for gender-specific needs and experiences. This approach would not only enhance educators' professional satisfaction and mental health but also contribute to the overall quality of higher education. Moreover, given the demanding nature of STEM fields, educators in these disciplines may face intensified pressures, making them particularly vulnerable to burnout symptoms. Future research should explore burnout patterns within STEM-specific contexts to develop targeted interventions that support educators in these high-stress academic areas.

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