

## Burnout and work engagement among teachers

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### Abstract

The Job Demands–Resources Model was used as the basis of the proposal that there are two parallel processes involved in work-related well-being among teachers, namely an energetical process (i.e., job demands → burnout → ill health) and a motivational process (i.e., job resources → engagement → organizational commitment). In addition, some cross-links between both processes were hypothesized. Structural equation modeling was used to simultaneously test the hypotheses in a sample of Finnish teachers ( $N=2038$ ). The results confirmed the existence of both processes, although the energetical process seems to be more prominent. More specifically, (1) burnout mediated the effect of high job demands on ill health, (2) work engagement mediated the effects of job resources on organizational commitment, and (3) burnout mediated the effects of lacking resources on poor engagement. The robustness of these findings is underscored by the fact that they were obtained in one half of the sample (using random selection) and cross-validated in the other half. © 2005 Society for the Study of School Psychology. Published by Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

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Teaching is stressful (Borg & Riding, 1991; Travers & Cooper, 1996); for example, it has been estimated that between 5% and 20% of all U.S. teachers are burned out at any given time (Farber, 1991). In comparison with other professions, teachers show high levels

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of exhaustion and cynicism, the core dimensions of burnout (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996; Schaufeli & Enzmann, 1998). In Finland, the country where the current study was conducted, educators have the highest burnout levels compared to workers in all other human services and white collar jobs (Kalimo & Hakanen, 2000). However, it is important to note that the majority of teachers are *not* anxious, stressed, unmotivated, or burned-out (Farber, 1984). Quite to the contrary, the vast majority are content and enthusiastic (Kinnunen, Parkatti, & Rasku, 1994; Rudow, 1999) and find their work rewarding and satisfying (Borg & Riding, 1991; Boyle, Borg, Falzon, & Baglioni, 1995). So far in the occupational health psychology literature, the negative aspects of teaching have dominated. Therefore, we have used the Job Demands–Resources Model in the current study in order to include not only teacher burnout and the associated process of energy draining, but also teacher engagement and the positive motivational process involved.

### **Balance models of job stress**

The point of departure for several models used in the job stress literature is that strain or stress is the result of a disturbance in the equilibrium between the demands that employees are exposed to and the resources that they have at their disposal. For example, according to the well-known and influential demands–control model (DCM; Karasek, 1979), job stress is particularly caused by the combination of high job demands (work overload and time pressure) and low job control. Thus, the DCM focuses only on one type of job demand (psychological workload) and one type of job resource (job control).

In general, one might argue that the strength of this model lies in its simplicity. However, this can also be seen as a weakness, since the complex reality of working organizations is reduced to only a handful of variables. Research on job stress and burnout has produced a laundry list of job demands and (lack of) job resources as potential predictors beyond those in the DCM, including emotional demands, low social support, lack of supervisory support, and lack of performance feedback, to name only a few (see Kahn & Byosiere, 1992; Lee & Ashforth, 1996).

A related point of critique is the static character of the DCM. For instance, in the DCM, it is unclear why autonomy is the most important resource for employees (and additionally social support in the extended demand–control–support model; Johnson & Hall, 1988). Would it not be possible that in certain work situations totally different resources prevail (for example, inspirational leadership in an Internet company, or open communication among reporters of a local TV station)? Similarly, many studies on teachers show that emotional demands, e.g., due to pupil misbehavior, are at least as important predictors of job stress as is work overload. In addition, since the DCM only recognizes few aspects of working conditions, it seems to be too general a starting point for improving working conditions and promoting well-being in most occupations.

### **The Job Demands–Resources Model**

According to the Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) Model (Bakker, Demerouti, De Boer, & Schaufeli, 2003; Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001), regardless

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