Gender differences in burnout: A meta-analysis

Radostina K. Purvanova a,⁎, John P. Muros b
a College of Business and Public Administration, Drake University, 2507 University Ave, Des Moines, IA 50311, USA
b Pearson, USA

A R T I C L E   I N F O
Article history:
Received 1 February 2010
Available online 2 May 2010

Keywords:
Burnout
Emotional exhaustion
Depersonalization
Labor policies
Occupational gender typing
Well-being
Gender differences

A B S T R A C T

The literature on male–female differences in burnout has produced inconsistent results regarding the strength and direction of this relationship. Lack of clarity on gender differences in organizationally relevant phenomena, such as work burnout, frequently generates ungrounded speculations that may (mis)inform organizational decisions. To address this issue, we conducted a meta-analysis of the relationship between gender and burnout using 409 effect sizes from 183 studies. Results challenge the commonly held belief that female employees are more likely to experience burnout than male employees, revealing instead that women are slightly more emotionally exhausted than men (δ = .10), while men are somewhat more depersonalized than women (δ = −.19). Although these effects are small, they are practically noteworthy when translated into a percent overlap statistic. Moderator analyses further revealed some intriguing nuances to the general trends, such as larger gender differences in the USA compared to the EU. In contrast, gender differences did not vary significantly in male-typed vs. female-typed occupations. Our analyses also suggest discontinuation of the use of overall burnout measures because they are highly consistent with the emotional exhaustion dimension of burnout only.

© 2010 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Work burnout is a type of strain resulting from prolonged exposure to chronic, job-related stressors (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). Historically, work-related burnout has been conceptualized as a three-dimensional construct, consisting of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and diminished personal accomplishment. Emotional exhaustion, or feeling overextended and emotionally and physically depleted at work (Maslach et al., 2001), has been called “an orthodox strain variable” (Salanova, Peiro, & Schaufeli, 2005, p. 808). Depersonalization, or distancing oneself psychologically from clients and co-workers, is also viewed as a strain (Semmer, McGrath, & Beehr, 2005). In contrast, diminished personal accomplishment, or feeling ineffective at work, has been criticized as being akin to a personality variable, such as self- or professional efficacy (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993; Shirom, 1989). Further, diminished personal accomplishment correlates only weakly with the other two burnout components, as well as with known burnout correlates (Kalliath, O'Driscoll, Gillespie, & Bluedom, 2000; Lee & Ashford, 1990, 1996; Schaufeli & Enzmann, 1998). As a result, recent scholarship has tended to focus mostly on emotional exhaustion and depersonalization (e.g., Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001; Maslach & Leiter, 2008). In short, emotional exhaustion and depersonalization—both defined as types of strain—are now viewed as the core components of burnout.

The present investigation examines the relationship between gender and the two core components of work burnout—emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. We chose to focus on gender for two reasons. First, gender differences on various variables, such as competence, personality, leadership, and well-being to name a few, are typically exaggerated beyond their true sizes, often to women’s disadvantage (Matlin, 2004). With respect to burnout specifically, there are arguments that burnout is more of a female experience (Maslach et al., 2001). In fact, however, the nature of the gender-burnout relationship remains unclear as only a handful of authors have investigated this relationship directly, and empirical results have been mixed. Because inflated claims about gender differences...
can be costly to both sexes (Hyde, 2005), our meta-analysis will help to clarify the issue by aggregating the empirical evidence on
gender differences in burnout. Second, gender is confounded with many other factors, such as educational background, occupation,
culture-specific social roles and expectations, and even economic and political realities (Sulsky & Smith, 2005; Maslach & Leiter, 2008).
Our meta-analysis will attempt to disentangle the effects of gender from those of other factors by examining moderators of the gender-
burnout link. We specifically focus on occupational gender typing and national labor policies as moderating variables. In sum, our
primary purpose is to estimate the magnitude and direction of the gender-burnout relationship; an additional purpose is to investigate
the role of moderators acting on that link.

1. Burnout: a female experience?

Speculations that burnout occurs more frequently among women are not uncommon (Maslach et al., 2001). Such speculations
may be dangerous for two reasons. First, at the workplace, work peers and superiors may perceive women as more likely to burn
out than men. Research shows that individuals stereotypically assume that women are more susceptible to stress—and by
extension to burnout—than men (Matlin, 2004). Even trained clinicians and physicians are not exempt from such assumptions as
they are more likely to diagnose female patients than male patients with depression and anxiety disorders, both when presented
with vignettes, or with real patients (Garrett, 1991; Lichtenberg, Gibbons, Nanna, & Blumenthal, 1993; Potts, Burnam, & Wells,
1991; Wrobel, 1993). If managers tend to perceive female employees as disproportionately more likely to burn out than male
employees, women may be passed up for challenging assignments and promotions.

Second, assuming that burnout is a mostly female experience may result in men not receiving enough attention or appropriate
care when they do experience burnout (Wilcox, 1992). The latter issue becomes even more noteworthy when one considers that
the two sexes may experience burnout in different ways. For example, in their qualitative review of the burnout literature, Maslach
et al. (2001) observed that there is a tendency for women to score higher on emotional exhaustion than men, whereas men tend to
score higher on depersonalization than women. This is consistent with gender role theory (Eagly, 1987; Eagly & Wood, 1982),
which predicts that women should be more likely to express feelings of emotional and physical fatigue (e.g., emotional
exhaustion) because they learn to display their emotions, whereas men should be more likely to shut off and withdraw under
stress (i.e., depersonalization) because they learn to conceal their emotions. However, both the general public and trained
professionals alike tend to associate emotion-expressive behaviors with psychological distress, whereas emotion-suppressive
behaviors tend to be associated with strength, masculinity and psychological adjustment (Landrine, 1988; Sprock & Yoder, 1997;
Widiger & Spitzer, 1991). This suggests that men’s burnout at the workplace may go unrecognized.

In brief, assuming that women are more burned-out than men may lead to implicit or explicit work discrimination against
women, and may result in failure to recognize burnout in men. Furthermore, discussing gender differences in burnout implicitly
puts the focus on only one of its two central components—emotional exhaustion—because emotional exhaustion has become
synonymous with burnout itself (Burke & Richardsen, 1993; Maslach & Leiter, 2008). Yet, based on gender role theory (Eagly,
1987; Eagly & Wood, 1982), and consistent with Maslach et al. (2001) qualitative review, one can expect important differences in
the two sexes’ reactions to job-related stressors. Specifically,

Hypothesis 1. Women experience higher levels of emotional exhaustion than men, and men experience higher levels of
depersonalization than women.

2. Moderators of the gender-burnout link

2.1. The moderating effects of occupational gender typing on the gender-burnout link

Despite significant increases in the number of women in the workplace globally (International Labor Office, 2007) and the
equal representation of the sexes in some occupations (e.g., journalism), most occupations remain gender-typed. Women are
frequently employed in occupations that fit stereotypes about female gender roles (e.g., caregiving/nurturing occupations,
support/administrative occupations), and men are typically employed in occupations that fit stereotypes about male gender roles
(e.g., physically demanding occupations, salaried occupations). Specifically, the 2008 report of the United States Bureau of Labor
Statistics (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2008) shows that women are still underrepresented in the following occupations: managers
(37%), computer operators (25%), architects and engineers (14%), scientists (46%), lawyers and judges (40%), dentists (27%)
physicians and surgeons (31%), police officers (15%), and correctional officers (30%), to name a few. In contrast, men are
underrepresented in the following occupations: nurses (8%), physician assistants (33%), community and social workers (21%)
educators and librarians (26%), telemarketers and customer service representatives (33%), childcare and elderly care workers
(4%), office support workers (25%), paralegals (12%), claim adjusters, accountants, and auditors (35%), and food preparation and
serving workers (35%), to name a few.

The numerical and cultural domination by one gender in a given occupation likely creates negative experiences for members of
the underrepresented gender (Hunt & Emslie, 1998). Though this issue has captured social scientists’ and feminists’ interest for
some time now (e.g., Acker, 1991; Bradley, 1989; Cockburn, 1990; Kanter, 1977; Zimmer, 1988), empirical research on health-
related outcomes for men and women in typical vs. atypical occupations has been scarce. Still, the available data strongly suggests
that women in male-typed occupations and men in female-typed occupations fare worse than women and men employed in
gender-typical occupations. For example, Hunt and Emslie (1998) reported greater psychological distress and poorer self-assessed
دریافت فوری متن کامل مقاله

امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات