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ABSTRACT
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serious proportions; (3) Teachers are "wornout" rather than burned
out; (4) There still remains a significant number of dedicated and
committed teachers; (5) A significant factor in the burnout process
is the lack of administrative and parental support for teachers; (6)
Suburban and urban schools differ in regard to the extent and pattern
of teacher burnout; (7) The usual solutions to teacher burnout are
doomed to be ineffective; and (8) A full understanding of the
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(Author/JD)

Teacher Burnout: Assumptions, Myths, and Issues

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Running head: Teacher burnout

Abstract

Based primarily on data collected on a sample of nearly 700 public school teachers, the present paper critically examined several key issues in the field of teacher burnout, coming to the following conclusions: that teacher stress and teacher burnout are distinct and separate concepts; that the problem of teacher burnout has reached serious proportions; that teachers are "wornout" rather than burned out; that there still remains a significant number of dedicated and committed teachers; that a significant factor in the burnout process is the lack of administrative and parental support for teachers; that suburban and urban schools differ in regard to the extent and pattern of teacher burnout; that the usual solutions to teacher burnout are doomed to be ineffective; and that a full understanding of the consequences of teacher burnout has yet to be realized.

Teacher Burnout: Assumptions, Myths and Issues

In the last 10-15 years vast numbers of people, especially in the human services, have embraced the concept of burnout and integrated it within their collective self-image as workers. This is particularly true of teachers. The word "teacher" modifies the word "burnout" all too well. Teachers who become burned out may be less sympathetic toward students, may have a lower tolerance for frustration in the classroom, may plan for their classes less often or less carefully, may fantasize or actually plan on leaving the profession, may feel frequently emotionally or physically exhausted, may feel anxious, irritable, depressed, and in general, may feel less committed and dedicated to their work (Farber & Miller, 1981).

Both the educational community and the public at large have shown enormous interest in the concept of teacher burnout. The causes, symptoms, and treatment of teacher burnout have, in recent years, been frequently described in popular magazines and professional journals. The National Education Association (NEA) made teacher burnout the central theme of their 1979 convention, and teacher trairers report that burnout is often the highest rated subject on needs assessment measures designed to identify major teacher concerns (Shaw, Bensky, & Dixon, 1981). Administrators have suggested that teacher burnout is the most serious problem facing educators in the 1930s (Gmelch, 1978). Burned out teachers have also become more vocal and visible and indeed, it is likely that many Americans by now are acquainted with at least one teacher who dreams of leaving the profession to go into publishing, the computer field, or small business. For many teachers, then, burnout is no longer a term of opprobrium. And parents, teachers, and administrators alike seem to be growing increasingly concerned over the potential effects of burnout on the quality of teaching.

Clearly teacher burnout is a critical social problem; ironically, however, widespread concern and interest in the phenomenon have served to obscure the gross inadequacy of the data base upon which our assumptions and putative solutions are based. Moreover, as Susan Jackson (1982) has observed, the word "burnout" has become a "verbal Rorschach test," assuming an idiosyncratic meaning for virtually every individual writing or thinking about this topic. In short, our knowledge of burnout has been seriously compromised by methodo- logical limitations and conceptual confusion. Given this state of affairs, it is no wonder, for example, why there are those who view burnout as an epidemic of tragic proportions (e.g., McGuire, 1979) while others feel that the term itself is an overused, convenient excuse for the lazy and self-indulgent (e.g., Morrow, 1981; Quinnett, 1981).

The primary purpose of the present paper is to critically examine some of the basic assumptions, issues, and controversies that have affected--and at times impeded--our understanding of the teacher burnout phenomenon. With this goal in mind, several propositions about teacher burnout will be advanced, and where applicable and available, data in support of these propositions will be offered. The data that will be brought to bear on this discussion were collected on a sample of 693 public school teachers in New York State, from both urban and suburban school districts, in the academic years 1980-1981, and 1981-1982. The sample consisted of 424 female and 249 male teachers. These teachers were primarily white (89.9%) and married (62.6%); their average age was 40.3. They had been employed as teachers an average of 13.4 years. There was a representative range of teacher in each grade level from Kindergarten through High School. The measure used with these teachers -- The Teacher Attitude Survey (TAS) -- is a modified version of the Maslach Burnout Inventory

(MBI). This latter instrument, originally developed by Maslach and Jackson (1981), has been used extensively to assess burnout in a wide variety of human service professionals. The central portion of this measure consists of 25 statements about professional work. Each statement is rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale for both intensity and frequency of agreement. For the purpose of investigating the specific nature of teacher burnout the 25 items on the MBI were augmented with 40 additional items of exclusive relevance to teachers. These items were chosen to represent the range of satisfactions and stresses in teaching most often noted in the literature. After recoding certain items so that all items were scored in a consistent direction, it was found that the correlation between the original 25 items on the MBI and the 40 additional items was .77; the correlation between the MBI and the entire TAS was found to be .92. Teachers in the suburban school districts completed the TAS at three different points during the school year; teachers in urban schools completed this measure at two different points. Data obtained from the 65-item TAS were analyzed in several ways. Basic statistics on both the frequency and intensity dimensions of each item (e.g., means, standards deviations, percentage of responses endorsing each choice point) were tabulated separately for suburban and urban teachers. Additionally, in order to get a more conceptually inte-grated view of the results, principal components factor analysis with varimax rotations was performed on the frequency dimension of the entire sample. Based on the resulting three factors, factor scale scores were generated for each subject and compared along various subject-related and school-related variables.

This paper will advance the following eight propositions:

1. That the literature in the field has consistently failed to distinguish between teacher stress and teacher burnout, and that the resulting

confusion has seriously impaired an effective understanding of either concept.

2. That the problem of teacher burnout is more than a faddish concept and has, in fact, reached serious proportions.

3. That the seriousness of the problem resides in the fact that teachers are actually "wornout" rather than "burned out."

4. That there still remains within the teaching profession a significant subset of dedicated, committed teachers.

5. That a significant factor in the burnout process is the failure of administrators and parents to provide support and encouragement to teachers.

6. That suburban and urban schools differ in regard to both the extent of burnout among teachers and the pattern of burnout over the course of a school year.

7. That the usual solutions to the problem of teacher burnout are doomed to be ineffective.

8. That some of the more critical and socially damaging consequences of teacher burnout have yet to emerge and may not manifest themselves for several more years.

Stress and Burnout are not Synonymous

The literature in the field consistently confuses the concepts of teacher stress and teacher burnout, either treating them as if they were interchangeable terms or "explaining" burnout simply by enumerating all of the many stresses teachers may encounter. The first error is perhaps motivated by the desire for data - since virtually no hard data on teacher burnout are available in the literature, data on teacher stress (cf. Cichon & Koff, 1978; Kyriacou & Sutcliffe, 1977, 1978; Pratt, 1978; Stress, 1980; Styles & Cavanaugh, 1977) is substituted. Behind the second error lies the implicit and erroneous assumption that a stressed teacher inevitably becomes a burned out teacher. Invariably ignored in either form of this confusion are the myriad number of variables that mediate between stressful environmental conditions and subjective perception of being "burned out," e.g., constitutional vulnerability to stress, cognitive appraisal of stressful events, personality type, other life events, and knowledge and availability of coping mechanisms, including social support. These factors explain why there is considerable variance in the ways that individuals react to identical or nearly identical stressful situations (cf. Jenkins, 1979). Also overlooked in the failure to distinguish between stress and burnout is the fact that stress can have both positive and negative effects - a fact that Selye (1956) noted over 25 years ago. In fact, a certain amount of stress is necessary to motivate action.

Burnout can be regarded as the final step in a progression of unsuccessful attempts to cope with negative stress conditions. Burnout then "is the result not of stress per se (which may be inevitable in the helping professions) but of unmediated stress - of being stressed and having no 'out,' no buffers, no support system" (Farber, 1982). Popular accounts of teacher burnout, however,

have opted not to explain the _process_ of burnout, but rather to simply list
its most observable and immediate precipitants, implicitly attributing teacher
burnout in urban schools, for example, to the prevalence of disruptive students.
While in some sense this is not entirely inaccurate, it is rather akin to
explaining World War I by referring to the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand
while omitting discussion of the entire social, historical, and political
context within which this event was embedded. In short, the equation stress ——>
burnout is a simplistic and misleading one, offering little in the way of
predictive or explanatory utility.

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Teacher Burnout: A Problem that has

Reached Serious Proportions

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It is likely, of course, that teacher burnout has always been around,
masquerading in the past under names such as job dissatisfaction and worker
alienation. Even 50 years ago, Waller (1932) described how community pressures,
the need for constant vigilance to control large numbers of students in classes,
and loneliness ard isolation could all combine to reduce a teacher's morale.
More recently, many of the critics of education in the 1960s--Kozol, Holt, and
Herndon, for example--took fellow teachers to task for their lack of concern
for students.

Stress and burnout in teachers, then, are not new phenomena. What is new
though is the extent to which at least some teachers seek a somewhat perverse
notoriety in declaring just how burned out they feel. Teachers in effect
saying to one another: "You think you're burned out...." The problem here is
one which Edelwich and Brodsky (1980) aptly termed "staff infection." When
enough teachers in a school spend their lunch hours denigrating students,
complaining about administrators, regretting their choice of careers and planning

for new ones, then burnout begins to feel less like a shameful emotion and more like a battle wound worthy of showing off.

What may also be new, is the magnitude of the teacher burnout phenomenon. There is, of course, no way of comparing the percentages of teachers burned out 20 or 50 years ago from the number burned out today. Moreover, it is clear that a determination of the seriousness of the teacher burnout problem is a direct function of the method we choose to define the term. For example, Learning magazine (Readers Report, 1979), by leaving the term burnout undefined and by simply asking teachers to state whether or not they had experienced feelings of burnout found that 93% of respondents to their survey had experienced such feelings. Similarly, the results of the author's two-year study of teacher burnout could be interpreted to mean that 76.9% of urban teachers and 71.9% of suburban teachers are burned out. These figures represent the percentages of teachers who responded with any answer other than "never" when asked the extent to which they had experienced burnout during the preceding month. Of course, we may agree that feeling burned out "rarely" during a given month should not define a teacher as burned out. The point is, however, whatever percentage we derive (of the number of teachers who are burned out) is neither inherently right nor wrong - there is no agreed upon definition of what constitutes teacher burnout. We are thus left in a situation analogous to that of psychotherapy research wherein a determination of the efficacy of psychotherapy is based directly on an arbitrary definition of "improvement" (Bergin, 1971). For example, using the same data, one researcher (Eysenck) can decide that 44% of patients in psychoanalysis are improved and another (Bergin) can argue that 83% (or 60% or 62%) are improved. What constitutes improvement? Or, more to the point of the present argument, what constitutes teacher burnout?

10

On what basis can we determine the magnitude of the teacher burnout phenomenon?

For the purposes of the present study, burnout was defined two different ways. The first method simply involved a determination of the percentage of teachers who, in response to the statement "During the last month I have felt burned out from my work," answered "frequently" (points "5" or "6" on a 0-6 frequency scale). On this scale (0 = never; 1-2 rarely; 3-4 = occasionally; 5-6 = frequently), 70% of suburban teachers indicated that they either never felt burned out or rarely felt burned out; 18.5% indicated that they occasionally felt burned out; and 10.3% felt as if they frequently felt burned out; similarly, 56.7% of urban teachers indicated that they either never or rarely felt burned out; 21.7% indicated that they occasionally felt burned out; and 21.6% indicated that they frequently felt burned out. On this basis then, 10.3% of suburban teachers and 21.6% of urban teachers are burned out.

Insert Table 1 About Here

A second more conservative way of defining burnout involved a factor analysis of the 65-item TAS. A principal components factor analysis with varimax rotations generated a three factor solution, with each factor comprised of items loading .35 or higher. The first factor, accounting for 42.3% of the variance, consisted of 17 items that are usually considered symptomatic manifestations of burnout (see Table 1). Internal reliability of this factor, as measured by alpha, was .93. By defining burnout as a score of 68 or more on this Burnout Factor (an average of 4 or more on each of the 17 items comprising the factor), 13.0% of urban teachers and 8.0% of suburban teachers can be considered burned out.

Using either method then, a substantial minority of teachers were found to
be burned out, supporting the contention in this section that teacher burnout
is a serious problem. Why has this happened? Several factors can be implicated.
In the last 10-15 years we have begun to see the educational consequences of
changing demographic patterns--for example, a population shift from rural to
urban communities. We've also begun to see psychological changes resulting
from the upgrading in teachers education, i.e., as teachers become more highly
educated they develop a greater expectancy of rewards. In addition, the
influx of male teachers into the educational system in the last 15 years has
resulted in increased demands for greater autonomy and improved salary
schedules. Increased bureaucratization as a result of the post World War II
baby boom--for example, a 50% increase in the number of administrators per
thousand pupils in New York city schools from 1958 to 1968--has also reduced
teachers' sense of autonomy. And in a related vein, the amount of paper work
performed by the entire enducational system has risen sharply in recent years
(Robison, 1980). The Civil Rights Movemen. in the 1960s also provided an
impetus and example for disgruntled groups such as teachers to express their
dissatisfaction. And, to a certain extent, teachers have become victims of
their own successes. With many parents as well-educated as their children's
teachers there is now less tendency to de:'er to teachers' "better judgment"
and more willingness to question and criticize. Finally, social observers
such as Lasch (1979), Packard (1972), Sarason (1977), and Slater (1976), have
all suggested that as a result of social changes in the last twenty years -
urban renewal, broken families, industrial relocations, the general mobility
of American families - American workers have become increasingly disconnected
and alienated from their communities, and increasingly insistent upon

attaining personal fulfillment and gratification from their work. The combination of these two trends has produced workers with higher expectations of fulfillment and fewer resources to cope with frustrations--a perfect recipe for burnout.

The growing impact of these trends is reflected in statistics regarding teacher "militarism" (number of annual nationwide strikes) and teacher commitment (number of years spent in teaching). The number of teacher strikes nationwide rose steadily from 5 in the 1963-64 school year to 114 in the 1967-1968 school year to 242 in the 1979-1980 school year. This trend does appear to be abating (McGrath, 1982) but primarily as a result of worsening economic conditions in this country. In regard to commitment to the profession: whereas in 1962, 28% of all teachers had 20 or more years experience, by 1976 that number had been reduced in half (Dubrin et al., 1979). Only 59% of teachers last more than 4 years in the classroom (Mark & Anderson, 1978); similarly, only 60% of current teachers indicated that they plan to remain in teaching until retirement (McGuire, 1979). In short, though a teacher's job has never been easy, the frustrations of teaching have probably increased in the last 15 years without a concommitant increase in perceived satisfactions or support (administrative, public, or financial). It is understandable, therefore, why burnout has, indeed, become a problem of serious proportions.

Teachers are Wornout, not Burned out

Freudenberger's (1974, 1975) original conception of burnout was that workers would find themselves under increasing pressure to succeed (in helping others), would demand more of themselves than they were able to give, and would ultimately burn out. According to Freudenberger, highly motivated workers would react to stress by overworking until they collapsed. He (1975)

referred to people who were "overly committed and excesively dedicated," and who "ignored their own discomforts and preferences almost without respite." This is not the typical picture of teachers who complain of burnout. Indeed, were this the case, though we might feel badly for a group of driven and unfulifilled teachers, we might well be thrilled with the educational benefits generated by this stance.

The problem is that teachers are not burned out, they are worn out. Instead of burning out from overwork, they turn off to the job and stop attempting to succeed in situations that appear hopeless. As Fischer (1983) has observed, "those who are burned out, rather than worn-out, cling tenaciously to a high sense of self-esteem;" those who are wornout have incurred damage to their sense of self-esteem (p. 42). The implications of this difference are not merely semantic. Teachers who burnout have given years of extraordinary service to their students and leave behind a legacy of goodwill, dedication, and learning; teachers who are wornout, on the other hand, resent their choice of careers, work halfheartedly with students with an "eye" on the clock, and leave behind a legacy of resentment, neglect, and frustration. There are, in fact, teachers who are burned out and they will be sorely missed. Unfortunately, the data suggest that there are many more wornout teachers than burned out ones.

To support this contention it is necessary to consider the second factor generated by the data of the present study. This factor, accounting for 18.8% of the total variance and with an alpha value of .84, consists of items that are related to teachers' sense of dedication and commitment to the teaching profession. The items loading most highly on this factor included: "If I had to do it all over, I would still choose to be a teacher" (.79); "I have felt that, all in all, the benefits outweigh the disadvantages of teaching" (.72);

"I see myself continuing to teach for the rest of my career" (.68); and "It has been my belief that I gain suitable emotional rewards from teaching given the effort I put it" (.64). That these items did not cluster, i.e., correlate highly, with the items comprising the Burnout factor, suggests that a commitment to teaching is not an associated feature of the burnout process. Moreover, the correlation between the Commitment to Teaching factor and the Burnout factor was - .41, p<.001, indicating that the more burned out a teacher is the less committed he or she is to the profession. The cause-effect relationship here is, of course, unknown and it is possible that those teachers who now appear burned out were once the most dedicated teachers in their school. It is clear, however, that the prototypical burned out teacher-- at least at the time he or she is manifesting symptoms of burnout-- is neither excessively committed nor dedicated to teaching. "Wornout," then, may well be a better description of these individuals than burned out.

Most Teachers are Still Caring, Involved, and Responsible

The problem of teacher burnout--or more accurately "wearout"--is, indeed, a serious one, affecting in the neighborhood of 10-20% of all teachers. It bears keeping in mind, however, that the majority of teachers working today are not burned out; indeed, they appear to care about their students, to be responsibly involved in their work with students, and to perceive themselves as effective in their roles. Teachers see themselves as helpfully involved with their students and seem to be gratified by the satisfaction that this engenders. The data of the present study strongly suggest, however, that while teachers are committed to their students, they are not committed to their profession. That is, teaching per se is apparently gratifying, but the

profession itself is not. As Jerry Kaiser (1981) has noted, "teaching itself
is not stressful, it's everything that gets in the way of teaching."

To illustrate these points, it is necessary to look at the composition of
Factor 3 in this study. This factor, accounting for 8.0% of the variance and
with an alpha coefficient of .88, is composed of items that reflect various
aspects of Effective Involvement with Students. The items loading most highly
on this factor included: "I have dealt very effectively with the problems of
my students" (.68); "I have felt I was positively influencing students' lives
through my work" (.68); "I have accomplished many worthwhile things in this
job" (.67); "I have felt exhilirated after working closely with my students"
(.66); and "I could easily understand how my students have felt about things"
(.53).

For the entire sample, the mean item score on the Effective Involvement
factor was higher ($\overline{X}$ = 3.7) than it was for the Commitment to Teaching factor
($\overline{X}$ = 2.6). The finding was true for both urban and suburban teachers when
each was considered as a separate subgroup. (Comparisons between these
groups indicated that suburban teachers had significantly higher mean item
scores on both factors.) Nevertheless, it is clear that both suburban and
urban teachers are considerably more impressed with the opportunities they have
for interacting effectively with students in a classroom than they are with
the status, salary, or respect their job engenders. The distribution of
scores of individual items within both these factors further emphasizes this
point. Virtually all items on Factor 3 (Effective Involvement) showed that
at least one-third of teachers at least "occasionally" feel effective in
helping and understanding their students, and that an additional one-third
"frequently" feel this way. Take, for example, the item "I have dealt very

effectively with the problems of my students." Only 2.1% of urban teachers indicated that they "never felt this way, 14.3% rarely felt this way, 36.2% occasionally felt this way, and 47.3% often felt this way. A similar pattern emerges for urban teachers on this same item: 3% of urban teachers never fell very effective in dealing with the problems of their students, 18.2% rarely feel this way, 46% occasionally feel this way, and 32.8% have frequently felt this way. Another item indicating effective involvement was: "I have accomplished many worthwhile things in this job." Only 2.6% of suburban teachers never feel this way, 18% rarely feel this, but 38.6% occasionally feel this way, and 40.9% frequently feel this way; 4.4% of suburban teachers never feel this way, 27.3% rarely feel this way, 33.2% occasionally feel this way and 35% frequently feel that they have accomplished many worthwhile things on their job. An item indicating an ability to understand students--"I could easily understand how my students have felt about things"--yielded similar results: only 1.3% of suburban teachers never feel this way, 13.3% rarely feel this way, 33.9% occasionally feel this, and 51.4% of suburban teachers frequently feel they can easily understand their students. For suburban teachers: 3.8% never feel they can easily understand how their students feel, 20.6% rarely feel this, 36.1% occasionally feel capable of understanding, and 39.5% frequently feel able to understand their students. The pattern of percentages on these items is in striking contrast to the pattern of percentages for items comprising Factor 2 (Commitment to Teaching). Most notably, on Factor 2 items there are a substantial proportion of teachers--particularly in urban schools--indicating that they "never" or only "rarely" feel committed to or satisfied with the teaching profession. For example, on the item "I have felt that if I had to do it all over, I would still choose to

be a teacher," 20.5% of suburban teachers and 34.2% of urban teachers
indicated "never," 26.9% of suburban and 21.3% of urban teachers indicated
"rarely," 20.3% of suburban and 18.6% of urban indicated "occasionally," and
32.2% of suburban and 25.9% of urban teachers indicated "frequently." Another
example: "I see myself continuing to teach for the rest of my career": 23.8%
of suburban and 29.1% of urban teachers indicated they "never" feel this way,
25.4% suburban and 21.9% urban indicated they feel this way only "rarely,"
22.5% suburban and 19.3% of urban teachers indicated that they felt this way
"occasionally," and 28.3% of suburban and 29.8% urban indicated that they feel
this way "frequently." (Note that while there is a significantly higher
proportion of urban teachers indicating they "never" see themselves as
continuing to teach for the rest of their careers, the proportion of highly
committed teachers is as high in urban schools as it is in suburban schools.)
One final, striking, example of teachers' feelings about the profession: on
the item, "I have felt satisfied with teachers' standing in today's society,"
40.5% of suburban and 48.0% of urban teachers "never" feel this way, and only
6.0% of suburban and 6.3% of urban teachers feel this way "frequently." What
may we conclude, then, at this time? First that teachers are less burned out
(or even worn out) than they are, in general, unconcerned and uninvolved with
the teaching profession; and second, that a primary source of satisfaction for
teachers is their sense of helpful intervention in the lives of their
students. In short, both effective involvement in the lives of students and
lack of commitment to teaching may play important roles in preventing or
reducing burnout: the first by mitigating the impact of stressful working
conditions, the second by providing a target--other than students--for
teachers' feelings of frustration and anger.

The Failure of Administrators and Parents

Administrators and parents cannot be unaware of the phenomenon of teacher
burnout; indeed, under ideal conditions both groups would be working with
teachers to reduce stress and facilitate optimal working conditions for teachers.
And yet, in both suburban and urban schools, administrators and parents are
perceived by most teachers as contributing more to the problems that teachers
face than to the help they need.

In suburban schools, over 86% of teachers surveyed have never or rarely
felt that administrative meetings prove helpful in solving the problems that
teachers face, 62.3% have never or rarely felt that they received support or
encouragement from their principals, 60% have never or rarely felt a "sense
of community" among the faculty and administrators of their school, and 67.1%
have never or only rarely felt that parents have made things easier for them.
In addition, as noted previously, even suburban teachers take a dim view of
the way that the teaching profession is perceived by the public -- a total of
80.4% have never or only rarely felt satisfied with teachers' standing in
society. As one might expect, these figures are even more startling among
teachers in urban schools: 90.6% of urban teachers have never or rarely felt
that administrative meetings are helpful, 76.7% have never or rarely felt
supported by their principal, 69.2% have never or only rarely felt a "sense
of community" in their school, and 75.5% have never or only rarely felt that
parents are making things easier for them. A total of 81.8% of teachers in
urban settings have never or only rarely felt satisfied with teachers's
standing in society.

Teaching has long been considered a "lonely profession" (Lortie, 1975;
Sarason, 1971). Too often teachers have only limited contact with other adults

during the school day; too often they become the "sole repository for skills, stamina, and enrichment -- a role that cannot long be endured by any single individual" (Farber & Miller, 1981, p. 239). To a certain extent this is a "structural" problem rooted within traditional conceptions of what teachers "should" do and how schools "should" functions (cf. Sarason, 1971). Even within traditional school settings, however, the loneliness and isolation that teachers face can often be mitigated by the availability of support from administration, parents and the local community, and the public at large. It is worth noting, too, that teachers need not only emotional support but technical support as well, i.e., expert advice and honest feedback from administrative personnel. In fact, Pines (1983) showed that, in relationship to five other types of social support, the absence of technical support is most highly correlated with burnout in human service professionals ($r = .42$, $p < .001$). When social support of any type is not forthcoming -- and according to teachers it has not been -- then the sense of isolation increases, resentment develops, and the stresses of teaching, now left relativ≥ly unbuffered, more frequently lead to burnout.

The Extent and Epidemiological Pattern of Burnout Are
Significantly Affected by School Setting

As noted previously, a greater number of urban than suburban teachers seem to be burned out. This finding was based on a survey of teachers carried out in October-November of the school year. Though this finding empirically corroborates previously untested assumptions about burnout, it still leaves unanswered a basic epidemiological question, i.e., do the percentages of urban and suburban teachers who are burned out remain relatively constant over the

course of the school year?

The present study found that the relative stability of burnout rates is different in urban schools than in suburban schools. In urban schools the percentage of teachers who are burned out remains quite constant over the school year. Using a score of 68 or over on Factor 1 (Burnout) as the criterion for burnout, in October-November 13% of urban teachers were burned out and in March-April 14% were burned out. Using the second criterion measure--a response of 5 or 6 (frequently") to the single item, "During the last month I have felt burned out from my work," in October-November of the school yar 21.6% of urban teachers were burned out and in March-April 18.3% were burned out. In suburban settings, on the other hand, the prevalence of burnout in terms of a single item score, the percentage of burnout in these teachers drops from 10.3% to 5.5%. Thus, during the course of the school year the rates of urban teacher burnout to suburban teacher burnout rises from, at most, 2:1, to approximately 3 or 4:1.

In short, burnout is a more stabel phenomenon in urban, rather than sub-urban, schools. One might assume that this finding is attributable to a reduction in the level of stress in suburban schools over the course of the school year. In fact, however, the mean score on Factor 1 actually increased significantly among suburban teachers from October-November ($\overline{X}$ =1.96) to March-April ($\overline{X}$ = 2.28), thus suggesting that levels of stress were actually higher in the spring that they were in the fall. Moreover, the mean scores of suburban teachers on both Factor 2 and Factor 3 decreased over this time period, indicating that in the spring teachers were feeling less satisfied with and committed to their profession, and feeling less gratified by their involvement.

with students. How then can we explain the fact that fewer suburban teachers
seem to be burned out in the spring than the fall? One hypothesis that is
supported by the data is that, during the spring months, suburban teachers have
greater access to or make better use of such coping mechanisms as social support.
Among suburban teachers the percentage of those who frequently feel a sense of
community in their schools rises from 15.2% in the fall to 19.5% in the spring,
and the percentage of thsoe who never or only rarely feel such a sense of
community decreases during this time from 60.0% to 45.5%. No such pattern can
be found among urban teachers -- the percentage of those frequently experiencing
a sense of community decreases from 11.7% to 6.8%; the percentage of those never
or rarely feeling a sense of community increases slightly from 69.2% to 70.1%.
Thus, for suburban schools it would appear than an increase in the perceived
availability of social support effects a substantial decrease in the percentage
of teachers who can be considered burned out.

The Usual Solutions to the Problem of Teacher Burnout
Are Doomed to be Ineffective

Teacher burnout will not "go away," at least in the near future. Despite
critics of the concept, teacher burnout has become an issue of increasingly
greater public and professional concern. Moreover, economic conditions in
this country have and will continue to exacerbate the problem of teacher
burnout. As a result of inflation and unemployment, teachers who want to
leave the field often find that they cannot. They feel stuck in teaching--
a position which intensifies feelings of irritability, anger, and loss of
commitment. As teachers continue to feel burned out and stuck, and as the
public becomes increasingly concerned over the potential effects of teacher

burnout on student performance, pressure to find solutions to the problem
of teacher burnout will undoubtedly intensify. Typically, these solutions
will fall into one of two categories: (a) stress-reduction techniques such
as jogging, meditation, biofeedback, or relaxation training (cf. Hendriks,
Thoresen,& Coates, 1975); and (b) group support techniques such as teacher
workshops that aim to lessen isolation and produce solidarity through the
sharing of problems and solutions (cf. Duncan, 1978).

Both type solutions are likely to produce some positive effects in teachers
inasmuch as both have been found effective in enabling people to better with-
stand the negative consequences of stress (cf. Goldfried & Davison, 1976;
Pilisuk and Parks, 1980). Teachers, for example, may feel gratified by the
opportunity to share their experiences in an atmosphere of acknowledgement and
support. However, such treatment efforts seem most likely to produce only
temporary, short-term benefits. To begin with, most of these solutions are not
ongoing efforts built into the structure of the school. They consist, for the
most part, of mini-courses, one-way workshops, Superintendents Days, and the
like. Moreover, as has been noted elsewhere (Farber & Miller, 1981), these
efforts fall within the category of "first order change." That is, they are
cosmetic changes, and do not alter the nature of the malfunctioning system, and
in fact, serve to perpetuate misconceptions regarding the origins and dimensions
of the problem. These solutions may provide teachers a quick fix of social
support or teach them how to cope better with stress but rarely do they provide
guidelines for altering the sources of stress, especially those that emanate
from a school environment that pays little attention to the needs of teachers
(cf. Sarason, 1971). Even, however, when such first-order change strategies
fail -- in this case when teachers begin to perceive one-day workshops as

essentially unhelpful -- these strategies are likely to be continued. The
nature of social science problem-solving is such that failure most often leads
to increased use of the same or similar strategies (Watzlawick, Weakland, &
Fisch, 1974).

There are several other reasons why these solutions are unlikely to have
any long-term impact on the incidence of teacher burnout. For example, it
has long been the experience of workshop leaders that those who attend sessions
are often those who need their help the least and that the most burned out
teachers are those who are first out the door at three o'clock who want no part
of anything additional associated with the school. In fact, a recent study by
Shannon and Saleeby (1981) found that those who attend stress management work-
shops are less likely to feel overburdened by personal and professional respon-
sibilities and are more likely to cope successfully with stress than persons not
attending such events. In addition, these solutions often fail to take into
account individual differences among teachers and settings, assuming homogeneity
in regard to such individual variables as size of school and availability of
administrative support. In essence, many workshops are geared to treating a
label ("burnout") and not a specific set of symptoms that are necessarily
embedded in a social-historical-political context (cf. Farber, 1983). Still
another limitation of typical attempts to treat teacher burnout is that they
generally pay insufficient attention to how administrators and parents affect
the experience of work for teachers. Focusing efforts on reducing stress
within the classroom or on creating collegial bonds with other teachers ignores
the potentially vital role of parents and administrators in mitigating stresses
for teachers. Finally, current efforts to reduce teacher burnout focus primarily
on treatment of already affected teachers. Strategies for preventing burnout,

e.g., by more adequately preparing teachers-in-training for dealing not only with students but also administrators and parents (cf. Sarason, 1971) or by restructuring schools to meet the needs of teachers (cf. Farber & Miller, 1981) have not been emphasized.

In summary, current efforts to treat teacher burnout may serve to temporarily ameliorate troublesome symptoms but are not likely to either prevent the reoccurrence of burnout in some teachers or the development of burnout in others. A truly comprehensive and enduring approach to burnout would entail the coordinated efforts of parents, administrators, teachers and unions, and would involve a commitment to and among teachers that transcends semi-annual workshops or discussion groups. Human service professionals such as teachers "should not be held responsible by themselves for combatting burnout" (Shinn & Morch, 1981, p. 238). In fact, individually-oriented coping strategies have been shown to be relatively ineffective in dealing with job-related stress (Pearlin & Schooler, 1978; Shinn & Morch, 1983). If teacher burnout is to be prevented, and if schools are to be made places that encourage the growth of teachers as well as students, then teachers must be made to feel respected and supported in their efforts to educate children.

The Consequences of Wear-Out and Burnout in Teachers Are Not Yet Known

We see the symptoms in teachers: anger, anxiety, depression, fatigue, boredom, cynicism, substance abuse, psychosomatic symptoms, and marital and family crises. The literature suggests too that teachers who are wornout or burned out, expect less work from their students and fewer rewards from their jobs, and that they distance themselves emotionally from students. We assume too -- and yet there is no data yet to support the assumption -- that teacher

burnout directly affects student performance.

What we do not know is what the long-term social consequences are of vast numbers of teachers who no longer feel enthused about their work. How will the publicity surrounding teacher burnout affect the recruitment of future teacher..? What of students who have been exposed to several consecutive years of burned out, or wo:nout teachers? Will they suffer a loss of self-esteem? Will they become permanently turned off to learning? Will their values regarding education change and be transmitted to their own children? What will be the effect of burnout on the attraction of parents to private schools? And what of the unintended consequences of our attempts to publicize and find solution to the problem of teacher burnout -- will these efforts result in non-wornout and nonburned out teachers feeling that they too are wornout and burned out?

Sarason (1977) has noted that the detrimental implications of disillusionment in human service workers extend "far beyond the spheres of their individual existence" (p. 232). Burnout has been and will continue to affect the lives of teachers ind their families, politicians and their families, community leaders and their families, indeed virtually everyone. We cannot yet know the long-term consequences of teacher burnout. It is likely though that at least some unforseen consequences of this growing social problem will emerge in the next decade.

Table 1

Factor 1 (Burnout): Items and Factor Loadings

Item	Factor Loading
I have felt burned out from my work.	.80
I have felt emotionally drained from my work.	.78
I have felt used up at the end of the workday.	.75
I have felt fatigued when I get up in the morning and had to face another day on the job.	.67
I have felt frustrated by my job.	.64
I have felt like I'm at the end of my rope.	.64
I have found teaching increases my irritability outside of school.	.64
I have felt that I am working too hard on my job.	.62
I have felt that my physical health has deteriorated as a result of teaching.	.60
I have experienced a sense of futility about teaching.	.57
I have seriously considered changing careers.	.55
I have had difficulty sleeping.	.51
I have felt that working directly with people has put too much stress on me.	.51
I have felt that working with people all day was really a strain for me.	.49
I have worried that this job is hardening me emotionally.	.46
I have been impatient with my students' lack of progress.	.44
I have found myself getting angry in the classroom.	.43

27

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