BURNOUT AND WORK STRESS AMONG DISABILITY CENTERS STAFF IN OMAN

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Extensive efforts have been made to maximize the potential of children with disabilities in Oman. The establishment of Al-Wafaa centers of disabilities served as a channel to help families secure a variety of services provided to children with different disabling conditions. The purpose of this study was to explore the burnout of staff working in the disability centers in Oman. A related purpose was to compare their burnout levels in relation to the type of disability (intellectual disability and hearing impairment) and years of experience (1-5 years, 6-10 years, and above 10 years). Also, the study explored the association between burnout and work stress. The participants were 81 female staff in the disability centers from different areas. The participants completed the Maslach Burnout Inventory and the Teacher Occupational Stress Factor Questionnaire (TOSFQ). The results of the study showed that disability centers staff had a moderate level in both emotional exhaustion and personal accomplishment while they had a high level of depersonalization. The Kruskall Wallis test showed a significant effect of the experience level in the depersonalization subscale, χ^2 (2, N = 81) = 6.07, p = 0.048. Post-hoc analyses using the Mann-Whitney test indicated that staff with the experience level (6-10 years) had a higher depersonalization level than the experience level (above 10 years). The results also indicated that a significant relationship was found between burnout and work stress. The results of the study are discussed in relation to the early intervention services provided to children with disabilities and how the study variables relate to the policy and practice in the disability centers in Oman.

Burnout and Work Stress among Disability Centers Staff in Oman: Does Experience and Type of Disability Make a Difference?

Recent developments in the field of special education have led to a renewed interest in the stress that special educators are exposed to in their professional life. When educators and teachers encounter recurrent daily stress, it may lead to burnout (Mearns & Cain, 2003). Burnout was coined as a term to refer to emotional exhaustion (overwhelmed by extensive work), depersonalization (negative attitudes toward the children), and personal accomplishment (negative evaluation of one's performance in the job) (Maslach & Jackson 1981). Burnout is related to frustration in the job and the negative affective and professional consequences (Mearns & Cain, 2003; Sari, 2004). Stress and burnout have an impact on the welfare of the employee and the quality of service within organizations (Seaward, 2008). Reducing staff stress will have an impact on absenteeism and turnover (Rose, 1995). Most importantly, the employer's responses may encumber their ability to deal efficiently with challenging behaviors (Rose, Horne, Rose, & Hastings, 2004). When the employees are subject to stress and burnout, they might be more inclined to abusive practices (White, Holland, Marsland, & Oakes, 2003).

Burnout and Special Education

Psychological theories had different explanations of job burnout. Those are the psychoanalytical theory, the existential approach, and the job-demand control model. According to the psychoanalytic approach, the lives of individuals are delineated consciously and unconsciously. The theory postulates that career choices are shaped through individuals' rearing and culture. Individuals strive to experience unpleasant experiences from their childhood by accomplishing goals set by their families through their careers. In the psychoanalytic approach, people often amalgamate the value of their careers with their view of self-worth (Pines & Yanai, 2001). According to the existential approach, it is important that individuals possess the belief that their personal experiences are valid and important (Pines, 2000). The two

perspectives were merged into what is known as *the psychoanalytic-existential model to uncover the source of job burnout. The psychoanalytical-existential approach assumes that the root of career burnout lies in the need of human beings to believe that their lives are meaningful, that the things they do, and consequently they themselves, are important and significant* (Pines & Yanai, 2001, p. 171).

According to this combined theory, people who were not able to resolve their psychological problems during their childhood are characterized by having a great deal of passion and they show a high sense of self-confidence in their career choice. Once these individuals achieve feelings of personal gratification and accomplishment from their careers, the bad experiences in their adulthood are generally resolved. On the other hand, if they will not have feelings of self-worth and success in their careers, they will tolerate the feelings of failure, which in turn, will lead to burnout (Pines, 2000).

Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter (2001) proposed a model of career burnout which consists of six domains (work overload, lack of control, insufficient reward, breakdown of community, absence of fairness and conflicting values). When the gap between any of these domains becomes larger, it is probable that the individual is susceptible to burnout (Maslach et al., 2001). Work overload is characterized by the overburden and excessive amount of work. Lack of control is experienced when employees have less freedom in their decisions and strategies to manage their work tasks. Insufficient reward refers to the amounts of intrinsic satisfaction of employees in the workplace. Breakdown of community is related to the isolation experienced by individuals in their jobs. Absence of fairness refers to feelings of respect, trust, and openness experienced by employees in the workplace. Conflicting values are related to the juxtaposition between organizations' values and real actions (Angerer, 2003).

One of the main reasons of burnout of special education teachers is the lack of administrative support (Stephens & Fish, 2010). A large body of administrators does not fully understand the special education policies and instruction. Therefore, they usually do not address the needs of special education teachers (Billingsley, 2005). Another main reason for special education teachers' burnout is the daily routines and responsibilities. Some factors that are related to these daily routines and responsibilities include excessive paperwork, placement, professional development, standardized testing, data reporting, scheduling, teaching and training, and ongoing changes in special education policy (Bozonelos, 2008; Stephens & Fish, 2010). Such duties are time consuming and they could diminish the amount of time allocated for teachers to spend with students with special needs (Vannest & Parker, 2010). Excessive paperwork might also jeopardize the special education teachers' duties and impact instructional time, efficacy, and commitments towards students (Mehrenberg, 2009). The lack of professional development opportunities may lead to burnout and attrition (Billingsley, 2007). Lack of instructional materials may also lead to stress (Kaufhold, Alverez, & Arnold, 2006). Positive interactions with colleagues or peers in schools or work can reduce the stress and negative emotions that lead to alienation and burnout (Schlichte, Yssel, & Merbler, 2005).

Teacher burnout can lead to negative effects on students' well-being, behavior, and performance (Kokkinos, Panyiotou, & Davazoglou, 2005; Yoon, 2008). Burnout is manifested through changes in attitudes and behaviors related to the job (Bilge, 2006). Changes in behaviors and attitudes are a direct result of the protracted responses to chronic stressors on the job and are reflected throughout the components of emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy (Maslach & Leiter, 2008). Emotional exhaustion is usually described as the individual's inability to offer any more of oneself at an emotional level. Cynicism, or depersonalization, is the negative attitude toward work, students, and colleagues. Low personal accomplishment, or inefficacy, is the inadequate performance and insufficient competence at work (Montero-Marín & García-Campayo, 2010). A review of the literature on burnout pointed out that organizational characteristics have been shown to be associated with emotional exhaustion. For example, a negative correlation between the overall perception of the organization and emotional exhaustion was found by Blumenthal, Lavender, and Hewson (1998). Devereux, Hastings, Noone, Firth, and Totsika (2009) found no relationship between staff support and emotional exhaustion. Also, positive social support was found to be associated with less emotional exhaustion (Janssen & Nijhuis, 2004). Maslash et al., (2001) posited that 'workload is most directly to the exhaustion aspect of burnout' (p. 414). Devereux et al., (2009) found that excessive work was associated with emotional exhaustion in disability services staff. There has been a decrease in the levels of burnout among staff working with intellectual disabilities over the past 20 years (Skirrow & Hatton, 2007). Organizational and environmental factors have been the most consistent predictor of burnout (see Hatton, Rose, & Rose, 2004).

Certain factors of work organization predict emotional exhaustion in professionals working with people with disabilities. These factors are work load, latitude in decision-making, and the importance of considering aspects of organization at the workplace to prevent burnout (Kowalski et al., 2010). Excessive exposure to aggression was associated with higher levels of emotional exhaustion and personal accomplishment in a sample of 169 staff members working in intellectual disability summer camps in Ontario, Canada. As the staff are vulnerable to aggression in the summer job, which is associated to burnout, there is a need for training and support (Ko, Lunsky, Hensel, & Dewa, 2012).

Hastings (2002) reported that there is an association between staff exposure to challenging behaviors and staff stress. Hensel, Lunsky, and Dewa (2012) studied the association between exposure to aggressive behavior and burnout in 926 community staff working with intellectual disabilities. They found that personal accomplishment scores were higher than comparable studies. Vassos and Nankervis (2012) investigated the association between factors contributing to burnout in a sample of 108 disability support workers. Results indicated that burnout predictors were challenging behavior, workload, supervisor support, work-home conflict, job feedback, role ambiguity, low job stress, role conflict, and work hours.

Work Stress and Special Education

Several theories explain work stress theories. The person-environment theory suggests that stress results from the degree of fit between the person and the environment. According to this theory, when this fit is weak, individuals may be subject to work overload, role ambiguity, and role conflict (Spielberger, Vagg & Wasala, 2001). Another model is the demand-control-support model. This model suggests that the work stress is affected by the interaction between the perception of work demands, perception of control, and the degree of support employers perceive (Karasek & Theorell, 1990). The cognitive behavioral approach proposes that stress is a cognitive process and an individual phenomenon (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). According to this model, stress is not inherent in the environment or the person but is a result of the relationship between them. According to the model, job stress or strain is interaction between demand and control. This model was used to classify work situations according to the balance they suggest between the demands on the workers and the level of control a person can put forth over those demands to better understand the link between the occupation and the psychological health (Sale & Kerr, 2002).

Several studies have been conducted to explore the challenging situations that special education staff encounter in their job (Billingsley, Carlson, & Kelin, 2004; Center & Stevenson, 2001; Kaufhold et al., 2006; Schlichte et al., 2005). Stress represents a main factor in the burnout of special education teachers (Center & Stevenson, 2001). The most frequent job stressors among special education personnel are large caseloads, several meetings, large amounts of paperwork, parental interactions and expectations, and lack of administrative support (Kaff, 2004; Schlichte et al., 2005). Other stressors encompass problems in curriculum, behavior management, unclear roles, low salaries, and lack of respect (Billingsley et al., 2004; Schlichte et al., 2005). Other factors that contribute to the teachers' stress are insufficient time for planning and changes in students' abilities (Kaff, 2004). Special educators are challenged by financial limitations and lack of relevant school resources (Kaufhold et al., 2006).

Gerstan, Keating, Yovanoff, and Harniss (2001) reported that the structure of special education job can lead to stress: *Expectations, goals and directives; the severity of student needs; student behavior and discipline problems; and bureaucratic requirements – rules, regulations, and paperwork* (p. 555). Since special education is a profession that entails emotional investment and because special educators are required to spend more time with students who exhibit little progress over time, they might develop factors related to the outcomes of emotional exhaustion and feelings of depersonalization (Embich, 2001). Stress has an impact on the well-being of staff working in intellectual disability services (see Hastings, 2002).

The Context of Special Education in Oman

The establishment of Al-Wafaa Centers in Oman has been a significant change in the care of children with disabilities. These centers are available in most of the Omani governorates. About 2173 children with disabilities receive educational and rehabilitation services in these centers. Although inclusive services have started in public schools a few years ago, Al-Wafaa centers for disabilities, under the patronage of Social Development Ministry, still remain the main source where parents bring their children with disabilities as a first station to receive services. These centers were based on voluntary donations and philanthropy but they turned to be governmental agencies starting from 2013. There are 19 disability centers spread all over Oman. These centers serve students with intellectual disability (35%), hearing loss (28%), motor impairment (12%), visual impairment (5%), and other disabilities (2%).

Children usually come with their parents to receive day-care programs provided by special educators to improve the quality of life for those individuals. The activities and programs provided to children in these centers include: a) training children on life skills that help them achieve independence, b) developing children's awareness to model the appropriate social behavior and sound habits, c) preparing children to join different educational and vocational institutions, d) raising the awareness of families about caring and dealing with the child, e) including the children with disabilities in the local society through social, cultural, and recreational activities, and f) raising the societal awareness related to the disability issues through workshops, symposiums, and philanthropic activities. Some problems jeopardize the activities of these centers. Some of these problems include the small of number of centers spread all over Oman, the lack of support programs for youth with disabilities upon the completion of their education and rehabilitation in these centers, and the lack of coordination among different institutions that serve individuals with disabilities in the country. These centers turned to be governmental institutions after royal amendments. As such, staff disability centers became official institutions under the supervision of the ministry of social development.

The current study is important as it is the first in Oman that addresses burnout and work stress exhibited by special education staff in these centers. No research, to date, has been implemented to explore either burnout or stress experienced by staff in these centers. Since these centers represent the focal point for parents of children with disabilities, there is a need to study the problems that might have an impact on the performance of staff working in these centers. Second, the field of special education and inclusion is fairly recent in Oman.

The purpose of this study was to explore the burnout of Omani caregivers in Disability Centers. A related purpose was to compare the caregivers' burnout levels in relation to the type of disability (intellectual disability and hearing impairment) and experience (1-5 years, 6 -10 years, and above 10 years). Also, the study explored the association between burnout and work stress. Several questions guided the study:

1. What is the level of burnout and work stress of special education staff at disability centers in Oman?
2. Is there any difference between intellectual disability staff and hearing impairment staff in their burnout and work stress levels?
3. What is the effect of experience on the burnout and work stress among special education staff?
4. What is the relationship between burnout and work stress in intellectual disability and hearing impairment staff?

Method

Participants

The sample consisted of 81 female special education staff. The sample was randomly selected from a pool of special education staff from different disability centers in the ten Governorates of Oman. The original population was 300 female staff which is the total number of staff working in these centers. The special education staff ages ranged from 27 to 42 years (M= 32.38, SD=6.96). All of the staff graduated from high school and they were recruited to work as volunteers in these centers approximately after 3 or 4 years from graduation from high school. Staff were recruited to work in these centers through written tests, interviews, and their interest in providing services to individuals with disabilities. Most of the female staff provided services to either children with intellectual disability or children with hearing impairment. This study focused on intellectual disability and hearing impairment as these two categories represented the most common disabilities in Omani disability centers. The number of children with other disabilities such as motor impairments, visual impairments, speech disorders, and multiple disabilities was little. Children with disabilities in these centers were usually referred to disability centers by local hospitals and medical centers. The study tools were mailed to staff in these centers and 81 participants responded. At least two centers in each governorate were represented in this study. The distribution of sample according to experience and type of disability is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Characteristics of the Study Sample

Type of Disability/Experience	1-5 years	6-10 years	Above 10 years	Total
Intellectual	12	23	21	56
Hearing Impairment	7	10	8	
Total	19	33	29	81

Instrument

Maslach Burnout Inventory.

The participants were asked to complete the Maslash Burnout Inventory-Educators Survey (MBI-ES). This survey was used to assess teachers' burnout (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996). This self-report scale has three subscales: a) emotional exhaustion, b) depersonalization, and c) personal accomplishment. The survey consisted of 22 statements that refer to personal feelings and attitudes toward job conditions. The emotional exhaustion subscale included nine items. They describe feelings of fatigue, loss of emotional energy, and tiredness. The depersonalization subscale assessed negative attitudes toward students and environmental settings and perceptions of achieving a person's goals in helping students to learn. The personal accomplishment subscale included eight items which refer to the teachers' perceptions of achieving one's goals of helping students to learn. The frequency of teachers' feelings on each item was measured using a seven-point Likert type scale (Never = 1, Every Day = 7). The Cronbach Alpha values were 0.71, 0.68, and 0.65 for the emotional exhaustion, personal accomplishment, and depersonalization subscales respectively.

Teacher Occupational Stress Factor Questionnaire.

The questionnaire used in this study is a modified version of the Teacher Occupational Stress Factor Questionnaire (TOSFQ, Clark, 1980). The TOSFQ consists of 30 items that measure teachers' perceptions of job-related stress. The questionnaire consisted of five subscales: administrative support (7 statements), work stress (8 statements), financial security (3 statements), relationship with teachers (7 statements), task overload (5 statements). The overall Cronbach Alpha reliability of the questionnaire was 0.88. Cronbach Alpha values for the administrative support, work stress, financial security, relationship with teachers, and task overload were 0.80, 0.62, 0.81, 0.65, and 0.53 respectively. The TOSFQ uses a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1-5. This can help respondents indicate how stressful or not they perceive specific events and situations that might occur in the school or the center.

Procedure

A mail survey, including the study tools, was sent to the study participants. The study tools were administered to a random sample of staff working at Al Wafaa Centers of Disabilities in different areas of the Sultanate of Oman. Teacher consents were secured prior to the beginning of the administration. The staff took about two months in responding to the study tools. The percentage of the staff who responded was about 75%. Then, the data were entered to the SPSS, version 21 to run the appropriate statistical analyses required to answer the study questions. The statistical analyses included descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) and inferential statistics (t-test, correlation, and ANOVA).

Results

The first question was: what is the level of burnout for staff working in Al Wafaa centers of disability? To answer this question, means and standard deviations for the three subscales of the Burnout scale were calculated. Means and standard deviations distributed across the two types of disability are shown in Table 2.

Also, mean ranks, chi-square values, and significance levels are shown in Table 3. Results showed that the level of emotional exhaustion and personal accomplishment of the staff in both hearing and intellectual disability was moderate. However, the level of depersonalization was high. To explore the differences among intellectual disability and hearing impairment staff in the MBI subscales and TOSFQ subscales, the Mann-Whitney test was employed. No significant differences were detected between intellectual disability and hearing impairment staff in the subscales of the burnout subscales and the subscales and total score of the TOSFQ.

Table 2. Means and Standard Deviations of the MBI Subscales and the TOSFQ Subscales and Total Score

Subscale	Type of disability	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
MBI(Emotional Exhaustion)	Intellectual	56	28.23	10.78	1.44
	Hearing	25	25.24	6.39	1.28
MBI (Depersonalization)	Intellectual	56	12.71	3.72	0.50
	Hearing	25	11.08	1.75	0.35
MBI (Personal Accomplishment)	Intellectual	56	41.70	6.11	0.82
	Hearing	25	41.48	6.80	1.36
Work Stress (Administrative support)	Intellectual	56	20.30	5.90	0.79
	Hearing	25	22.24	6.02	1.20
Work Stress (Working with students)	Intellectual	56	22.07	4.52	0.60
	Hearing	25	21.04	4.41	0.88
Work Stress (Financial security)	Intellectual	56	8.93	3.72	0.50
	Hearing	25	9.12	3.75	0.75
Work Stress (Relationship with teachers)	Intellectual	56	21.71	5.13	0.69
	Hearing	25	22.56	4.49	0.90
Work Stress (Task overload)	Intellectual	56	14.00	3.90	0.52
	Hearing	25	13.88	2.74	0.55
Work Stress Total Score	Intellectual	56	87.02	18.41	2.46
	Hearing	25	88.84	14.31	2.86

To answer the third question, the Kruskall-Wallis test was calculated to explore the effect of the three levels of experience on both MBI and work stress subscales. The analysis was significant, F (2, 72) = 2.66, p = 0.013. The Kruskall Wallis test showed a significant effect of the experience level in the depersonalization subscale, χ^2 (2, N = 81) = 6.07, p = 0.048. *Post-hoc* analyses using the Mann-Whitney test indicated that staff with the experience level (6-10 years) had higher depersonalization level than the experience level (more than 10 years), U = 313, p = 0.015.

To answer the fourth question, Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to explore the relationship between the burnout and work stress of both hearing impairment and intellectual disability staff. As shown in Table 4, the emotional exhaustion subscale was significantly correlated to the work stress subscale, r(81) = .33, p < .01. Also, the financial security subscale was significantly correlated to the emotional exhaustion subscale and the depersonalization subscale, r (81) = .29 and .30, p < .01 respectively. Also, a negative significant correlation was found between the level of experience and the depersonalization subscale, r = - 0. 28, p = 0.05.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the burnout of Omani caregivers in Disability Centers. A related purpose was to compare the caregivers' burnout levels in relation to the type of disability (intellectual disability and hearing impairment) and experience (1-5 years, 6-10 years, and above 10 years). Also, the study explored the association between burnout and work stress. The results showed that level of emotional exhaustion and personal accomplishment of the staff working with both hearing and intellectual disability was moderate while the level of depersonalization was high. No significant differences between the hearing impairment and intellectual disability staff in the burnout subscales, work stress subscales, and the total score. The emotional exhaustion subscale was significantly correlated to the work stress subscale. Also, the financial security subscale was significantly correlated to the emotional exhaustion subscale and the depersonalization subscale. The level (6 to 10 years) had the highest burnout in the depersonalization subscale.

Table 3. Mean Ranks, Chi-Square Values, and Significance Levels of the Work Stress Subscales and Burnout Subscales

Subscale		N	Mean Rank	χ^2	Sig.
Work Stress Administrative support	1-5 years	19	39.71		
	6-10 years	33	38.44	1.19	.55
	> 10 years	29	44.76		
	Total	81			
Work Stress working with students	1-5 years	19	38.74		
	6-10 years	33	37.67	2.13	.31
	> 10 years	29	46.28		
	Total	81			
Work Stress Financial security	1-5 years	19	34.18		
	6-10 years	33	41.89	2.28	.32
	> 10 years	29	44.45		
	Total	81			
Work Stress relationship with teachers	1-5 years	19	48.24		
	6-10 years	33	38.55	2.36	.31
	> 10 years	29	39.05		
	Total	81			
Work Stress Task overload	1-5 years	19	37.45		
	6-10 years	33	42.44	.58	.74
	> 10 years	29	41.69		
	Total	81			
WS Total Score	1-5 years	19	39.39		
	6-10 years	33	39.38	.68	.71
	> 10 years	29	43.90		
	Total	81			
MBI Emotional Exhaustion scale	1-5 years	19	42.42		
	6-10 years	33	37.48	1.30	.52
	> 10 years	29	44.07		
	Total	81			
MBI Depersonalization	1-5 years	19	43.66		
	6-10 years	33	46.65	6.07	.04
	> 10 years	29	32.83		
	Total	81			
MBI Personal Accomplishment	1-5 years	19	35.61		
	6-10 years	33	41.12	1.61	.45
	> 10 years	29	44.40		
	Total	81			

Table 4. The Correlation between the TOSFQ and the MBI Scale

	Experience	Admin Support	Work Stress	Fin. Security	Relationship with Teachers	Task Over-load	Emotional Exhaustion	Depersonal-ization	Personal Accomplish-ment	Total Work Stress
Experience	-	0.00	0.11	0.11	-0.05	0.03	0.07	-.278*	0.20	0.04
Administrative Support		-	.364**	.292**	.603**	.614**	0.04	0.12	0.20	.806**
Work Stress Financial			-	.423**	.484**	.621**	.335**	0.15	0.08	.746**
Security				-	0.17	.517**	.295**	.295**	0.12	.585**
Relation with Teachers					-	.553**	0.22	0.13	0.09	.775**
Task Overload						-	.323**	0.14	0.13	.853**
Emotional Exhaustion							-	.356**	0.08	.293**
Depersonal-ization								-	0.14	0.21
Personal Accomplish-ment									-	0.17
Total Work Stress										-

Note: * Significant at the 0.05 level; ** Significant at the 0.01 level

The results of the study are somewhat similar to what Motti-Stefanidi (2000) found and reported that the level of burnout for special education teachers was moderate. The interpretation of this finding is that Al Wafaa centers staff had permanent positions since the governmental decisions stated that these centers would change to governmental agencies and that the personnel working in these centers would be qualified and hired on a full-time basis. This was also consistent with what Platisdou and Agaliotis (2008) found. They reported that special education teachers showed low to moderate levels of burnout. This finding is not consistent with what Zabel and Zabel (2001) found that the level of experience did not have an effect on burnout. This finding might be attributed to the fact special education teachers in the disability centers hold permanent jobs in the meantime. In the past, these centers were based on philanthropy but they turned now to governmental centers. The results of the study are also in line with the results of Küçüksüleymanoğlu (2011) who concluded that intellectual disability teachers had higher depersonalization than hearing impairment teachers. Surveys of intellectual disability services concluded that between 32.5% (Hatton et al., 1999) and 25% (Robertson et al., 2005) of staff experienced significant levels of stress. This finding is in contrast with what Ko et al., (2012) found. They concluded that staff supporting people with intellectual disability in summer camps had low levels of depersonalization.

This study produced results which corroborate the findings of a great deal of the previous work in this field. Kowalski et al., (2010) concluded that the work load predicted the emotional exhaustion among professionals working with people with disabilities. Taken together, the results suggest that staff in the disability centers might encounter negative feelings toward children with disabilities. The author of this study taught a large proportion of females working in the centers through a two-year diploma in special education. The staff, during the courses, expressed their feelings of dissatisfaction and discomfort toward the lack of systematic plan of diagnosis and intervention in these centers. The author argues that the staff's attitudes are not negative toward the children with disabilities; rather, they feel that the disability centers still need significant improvements on different levels including human resources.

The results also showed that those having 6-10 years of experience had a higher level of depersonalization than the other two levels of experience. This finding is consistent with the literature that those whose teaching experience is shorter had more burnout (Kilgore & Griffin, 1998). This also contradicts with what Küçüksüleymanoğlu (2011) found. Although differences among experience levels were not significant on the depersonalization subscale, teachers who had the experience level (more than 10 years) had the lowest burnout score. Zabel and Zabel (2001) reported no significant differences related to the amount of experience in the depersonalization subscale. Kowalski et al., (2010) found no impact of professional experience on burnout. Ko et al., (2012) concluded that experience was not

associated to the three burnout dimensions. Hatton et al., (1999) found a small but direct relationship between support from colleagues and immediate supervisors. Years of experience have been reported as high predictors of teacher burnout and attrition and have been consistently connected to special education teacher burnout (Billingsley, 2004). Researchers found that the rate of attrition due to burnout is very high for teachers who are less experienced and who are at the beginning of their job life, and then goes down for middle-age teachers, and then increases when teachers are close to retirement (Mukundan & Ahour, 2010). This finding suggests that staff who are having 6-10 years of experience might be at higher risk of burnout. The author argues that when staff in the disability centers experience excessive duties throughout the day; and given that they have more experience than others, parents and administrators might put an extra burden on their shoulders. Therefore, they are exposed to stress which leads to burnout. The fact that they are more experienced makes them guide the less experienced staff and, therefore, they are prone to higher rates of depersonalization.

Research indicated that demographic variables such as years of experience have an impact on the special education teacher's intent to leave (Boe & Cook, 2006; Olivarez & Arnold, 2006). Nonetheless, research related to the impact of demographic variables of the special teacher education is still inconsistent (Kokkinos, 2007). Low scores in depersonalization refer to increased work commitment (Maslach & Leiter, 2008). Also, a relationship exists between higher levels of empathic concern (feeling of concern for another person) and lower levels of depersonalization (Lakin, Leon, & Miller, 2008).

Teachers in the disability centers should be empowered by having more professional development opportunities. Teachers' empowerment has a direct impact on students' achievement (Zembylas & Papanastasiou (2005). Teachers in these centers feel that they are part of the decision-making process. Teachers' perceptions about their input are related to their attrition or intent to stay in the job (Darling-Hammond, 2003). Accordingly, teachers should play a critical role in the conceptual and operational process of their institutions, including impact on classroom and overall policies (Leiter & Maslach, 2004). The interpretation of the low scores on the depersonalization subscale might be due to problems related to classroom management and students' challenging behaviors. Classroom management, discipline maintenance, and students' challenging behaviors represent a major source burnout (Clausen & Petruka, 2009; Geving, 2007). Also, research posits that special education staff who interact with students with significant behavioral problems (e.g. self-injurious behaviors, hyperactivity, impulsivity, verbal and physical aggression, violence, and other behavioral disorders) are likely to have higher rates of burnout (Kaff, 2004; Lecavalier, Leon, & Wiltz, 2006). The recurrent exposure to aggressive and violent behaviors from students with disabilities may develop emotional exhaustion and depersonalization (Mitchell & Hastings, 2001).

Another issue related to the disability centers in Oman is the nonexistence of general curriculum for children with disabilities. Staff in these centers are generally volunteers who joined the center based on their personal interest in addition to other factors of hiring such as interviews and written tests. Some of the staff in these centers take a two-year diploma as a professional development. The officials in charge of these centers have a long-term plan to get the staff involved in this professional development experience. In this diploma, they have a chance to study special education in depth. However, they reported that have a difficulty in applying the theory into practice. It is an issue of juxtaposition between what they see in the university and what they experience in the field. Special education teachers *must be knowledgeable about the general education curriculum, skillful at anticipating student difficulties with learning tasks, and adept at providing ongoing adaptations and accommodations* (Klinger & Vaughn, 2001, p. 1). Another problematic issue is the misdiagnosis of children. Sometimes, staff in these centers report problems of misdiagnosis. Children who join these centers are usually diagnosed in hospitals and medical centers spread all over Oman, albeit, staff in the disability centers reported issues of misdiagnosis. This issue might increase their feelings of stress and burnout.

Implications

On the basis of the findings of this study, disability centers in Oman could eventually adopt standard practices related to the diagnosis and intervention of children with disabilities. The study pinpointed significant predictors that are associated to the turnover of staff from disability centers. Future research should consider problems that staff encounters inside the organizations (e.g. organizational climate, relationship among workers, reaction of parents, relationship between the staff and the children with disabilities). This study can be helpful in exploring possible solutions or acts as a knowledge base for future research.

Limitations

A number of caveats need to be noted regarding the present study. First, using two self-report measures might subject to recall bias. Second, the cross-sectional nature of the study might refer to the association or relationship among study variables; however, no causality can be inferred. Third, the small sample size might have affected the results. Larger sample size could have further stronger associations among the study variables. Further assessment of the disability center staff should consider other variables such as organizational factors, lack of professional development, lack of sufficient resources, lack of referral services, and other psychological problems they might encounter.

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