AN INVESTIGATION OF SOCIAL SUPPORT AND BURNOUT AMONG SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS IN THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

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This study aimed at investigating which source of social support (supervisors, colleagues, friends, spouse, or family) would be most effective in reducing burnout among special education teachers. A sample of 300 special education teachers (50 males and 250 females) completed Burnout and Sources of Social Support questionnaires. Pearson correlation coefficients and ANOVA procedures were utilized to analyze the data. Results revealed significant positive correlations between family support, colleagues support, and personal accomplishment. Demographic variables sex, age, marital status, and teaching experience were not significantly related to any of the three burnout dimensions. Results were interpreted and implications for special education teachers were suggested.

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is comprised of seven emirates. It is situated on the Arabian Gulf, east of Saudi Arabia and north of Oman. The economy is driven by oil and gas and recently tourism. There is a large expatriate population in the country.

In 1951, the Trucial States Council was formed, bringing all the leaders of the various groups throughout the region together. In 1971 the formal joining of the seven emirates (Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ras Al-Kahaimah, Umm Al Qaiwain, and Ajman) was completed in Dubai. There are no political parties or elections since the country is ruled by appointed families established with the formation of the UAE.

The Education System in United Arab Emirates
The United Arab Emirates Ministry of Education and Youth is responsible for both the public and the private education systems that operate within the country's seven emirates. For the public school system, the Ministry of Education and Youth assumes a broad set of roles, similar to Ministries of Education in other countries. It builds new buildings, hires staff, determines the standards of education, and provides curricular materials and support. The Ministry also coordinates a variety of educationally relevant activities and ensures that adequate programs are operating. On the other hand, the roles of the Ministry of Education and Youth with the private education system are mainly concerned with licensure and supervision. The Ministry ensures that the basic requirements for the physical components of schools are met and that the private schools provide sound educational programs (Bradshaw, Tennant, & Lydiatt, 2004).

Special Education in United Arab Emirates
Special Education in United Arab Emirates has witnessed a massive development since 1979. The provision of special education programs and services in the UAE has evolved and expanded to recognize a wider variety of categories of special education, which is also available to students at higher grades, and to promote inclusive education, or access to educational opportunities. The categories of special education now include the gifted and talented individuals whose abilities, talents and potential for accomplishments are so exceptionally advanced that special education and support services are needed for the students to meet educational objectives and goals in the general education classrooms. In addition,

in 2006, special education programs and services in the UAE were expanded to include the delivery of services to students up to the 9th grade.

In the past, the Ministry of Education in the UAE primarily provided special education programs and services to students with intellectual disabilities in community or center-based educational programs, while students with sensory and physical disabilities received their education in general education classrooms and received support from regular and special education teachers. The UAE Federal Law, No. 29, 2006, regarding the rights of Persons with Special Needs has resulted in an increase in the number of students with intellectual disabilities being included in the general education schools (Ministry of Education, 2010).

The primary function of a special education teacher in United Arab Emirates is to accept students with special needs and provide them with equal opportunities to learn. The instructor is also required to monitor the implementation of special education programs and provide periodic reports on the status of these programs and services, to participate in the meetings, training courses, workshops and special activities aimed at improving the quality and delivery of special education programs and services. Furthermore, a special education teacher is expected to conduct assessment to determine a student's level of academic performance, to perform the necessary diagnosis of the children with learning disabilities, measure the forms of disabilities and coordinate regular classes with parents, school administrators, and the educational counselor in order to identify the case and the need for joining a special resource room (Ministry of Education, 2010).

In recent years, teacher stress has increasingly been recognized as a widespread problem and has become a global concern (Kim, Lee, & Kim, 2009; Chan, 2007).Almost one third of the teachers surveyed in various studies around the world have reported that they regard teaching as a highly stressful job (Borg, 1990). Researchers have attempted to identify occupational stressors within the teaching environment. These include work overload, role ambiguity and conflict, pressures of the teachers' role, inadequate resources, poor working conditions, lack of professional recognition, low remuneration, lack of involvement in decision-making, lack of effective communication, staff conflicts, and student misbehavior (Kim, Lee, & Kim, 2009).

Burnout is a major problem in education, teaching in particular has been identified as a stressful situation. Burnout in the teaching profession is described as similar to burnout at work in general. In a number of studies concerning teacher burnout, the latter is identified as resulting from ongoing stress (Kim, Lee, & Kim, 2009; Talmor, Reiter, & Feigin, 2005). The symptoms are mainly headaches, migraines, hypertension, nervous stomach, loss of appetite, weight loss and bowel difficulties (Alkhrisha, 2002).

Friedman (2000) found that the main components of burnout among teachers are: exhaustion, a sense of lacking professional fulfillment and an attitude of de-personalization that is expressed by blaming the student. He found that the essence of burnout among teachers is the feeling of professional failure as a result of the gap between the actual feelings of personal professional competence and the ideal competence to which the teacher aspires. The personal competence of teachers relates not only to teaching tasks and interpersonal relationship between teachers and students, but also to the teacher's performance in the school organization.

Talmor et al., (2005) identified several signs of burnout. They reported that the outward expressions of teacher burnout are usually extreme reactions of anger, anxiety, depression, fatigue, cynicism, guilt, psychosomatic reactions and emotional breakdown. Thus, based on this study, the trained observer should be able to easily recognize burnout.

According to Schamer and Jackson (1996), burnout can cause teachers to develop negative attitudes towards students and lose their idealism, energy, and purpose. Furthermore, it can make teachers behave rigidly and show an overly tough attitude towards their students, and have negative and low expectations of students, and they may feel exhausted, emotionally and physically, and show low levels of involvement in teaching or concern for their students(Hoffman, Palladino, & Barnett, 2007).

Platsidou and Agaliotis (2008) reported average to low levels of burnout among special education teachers in Greek. They found teacher burnout may be caused by various factors, including excessive work, work conditions and low satisfaction with prospects of promotion and pay.

Kokkinos (2007) investigated the association between burnout and job stressors among primary school teachers. The conclusions of the investigation indicate that managing students' misbehavior, teachers' appraisal by students' work load, and the time constraints are predictors of dimensions of burnout.

Researchers have identified several factors that contribute to the teacher burnout syndrome. Of importance to teachers, particularly special educators are performance of custodial and managerial tasks, excessive amount of direct contact with children, a perceived lack of job success, program structure, and work overload (Sari, 2004; Friedman, 2000). Teacher burnout may be caused by various factors, including excessive work, lack of administrative and parental support, inadequate salaries, disciplinary problems, lack of students' interest, overcrowded classrooms, and public criticism of teachers and their work (Sari, 2004). In other studies (Hoffman, Palladino, & Barnett, 2007; Kokkinos, 2007; & Friedman, 1995), it has been found out that burnout among teachers is often caused by high levels of prolonged stress related to inordinate time demands, large class size, lack of recourses, role ambiguity, lack of support, involvement in decision making, and student behavioral problems. According to Alkhrisha (2002), major sources of stress of Jordanian teachers are workload, low salary, lack of self-esteem, lack of in-service training opportunities, lack of access to new information and knowledge. Also, this study found that demographic variables are the major sources of teacher burnout. In addition, some demographic variables, such as age, marital status, experience and sex, were found to be related to burnout (Kokkinos, (2007); Miller, Brownell, & Smith, 1999; Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997; Alkhrisha, 2002).

First introduced by Freudenberger (1980), professional burnout occurs in response to prolonged work tensions and stressors. Pine and Keinan (2005) reported that it *happens most often among those who work with people and results from the emotional stress that arises during the interaction with them* (p. 387).According to Maslach and Jackson (1986), burnout is comprised of three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, lack of personal accomplishment and feelings of depersonalization. Leung, Siu, and Spector (2000) reported that burnout symptoms include recurrent bouts of flu, headaches, fatigue, poor self-esteem, difficulty in interpersonal relationships, substance abuse, inability to concentrate on a subject, rigidity and a tendency to blame others for one's problems.

Although different definitions of burnout exist, this long-term stress reaction is most commonly described as a psychological syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who work with other people in some capacity. Emotional exhaustion refers to feelings of being emotionally over extended and depleted of one's emotional resources.

Depersonalization refers to a negative callous or excessively detached response to other people, who usually, are, the recipients of one's service or care. Reduced personal accomplishment refers to a decline in one's feelings of competence and successful achievement in one's work (Hastings, Horne, & Mitchell, 2004, p. 268).

Consequences of burnout include significant decrease in the quality of teaching, long absenteeism, early leaving of the profession, diminished job satisfaction and reduced teacher–pupil rapport. Decreased teacher effectiveness in meeting educational goals and reduced pupil motivation also result from burnout (Abel & Sewell, 1999).

Several studies have recently addressed various issues related to teachers and children with special needs. For example; Dababseh (1993) found moderate levels of burnout among teachers of children with special needs. In another study, morale of special education teachers was most satisfied with relations to community, rapport with students, and satisfaction with teaching and least satisfied with work load and financial incentives (Al-Khateeb, Hadidi, & Elayyan, 1996). Alkhrisha (2002) found high levels of burnout among Jordanian teachers. Also, this study found that demographic variables are the major sources of burnout in Jordan.

Several studies reviewed show that professionals working with special needs students are apt to develop the burnout syndrome, which leads to an impairment in the quality of the services provided by the organization (Cherniss, 1988; Eichinger, Heifetz, & Ingraham, 1991). Of the variables identified as antecedents of the syndrome within professionals working with special needs students, variables of a

socio-demographic style, lack of social support at work, autonomy, and work overload, among others, are mentioned (Sari, 2004).

Burnout has a negative effect not only on work performance and satisfaction but also on one's social life and personal relationships (Hastings et al., 2004). For instance, Olsson and Hwang (2001) showed that, special education teachers experienced a high prevalence of depression, burden and psychological distress and role conflict. Consequently, staff stress has been found to be associated with intended turnover and absenteeism from work.
They suggest that it is reasonable to conclude that a causal relationship exists between these role dysfunctions and the burnout syndrome within this kind of profession.

Social support has been defined as *processes of social exchange that contribute to the development of individuals' behavioral patterns, social cognition, and values* (p.433). Tracy and Whittaker (1990) defined social support as the means by which people give assistance to each other.

Research findings concerning the relationship between social support and burnout have been inconsistent (Haddad, 1998). Some research has suggested that social support has a negative relationship with burnout (i.e., high levels of social support are associated with low levels of burnout (Maslach & Jackson, 1986).

Russell, Altmaier, and Velzen (1987) found that social support is not associated with any of the MBI dimensions at a significant level. Later, however, Price and Spence (1994) showed that sources of social support are significantly associated with all the MBI dimensions.

In regards to the sources of social support, research has not clarified which source of social support is more closely related to burnout and its dimensions. Some studies (e.g., Richardsen, Burke, & Leiter, 1992; Gil-Monte et al., 1993) found that the relationship between supervisors' social support and emotional exhaustion is not significant. However, some other studies (e.g., Price & Spence, 1994; Turnipseed, 1994) found that the relationship between this source of support and personal accomplishment is not significant, but that it is significant for the rest of the MBI and its dimensions. Ross et al., (1989) found that the relationship between supervisors' social support and all three dimensions of burnout is significant, while colleagues' social support was significant to none. Similarly, Russell et al., (1987) found supervisors' social support related significantly to burnout dimensions, whereas colleagues' social support was related to none.

In regard to teaching experience, workers who had few years of experience reported more burnout (Ross et al., 1989; Kruger et al., 1991). The results of other studies indicate that there is no significant difference in the burnout level in respect to teaching experience (Bataineh, 2005; Haddad, 1998).

As far as marital status is concerned, married workers experience greater emotional exhaustion than those who are not married (Ross et al., 1989). The results of other studies suggest that married workers experience less burnout (Bataineh, 2005; Haddad, 1998; Russell et al., 1987).

Concerning gender differences, some studies reported that men tend to experience higher levels of burnout than women (Bataineh, 2005; Kruger et al., 1991; Russell et al., 1987), whereas other studies reported no differences between men's and women's levels of burnout (Haddad, 1998; Ross et al., 1989). However, Bataineh (2005) found age to be related to burnout levels, while other studies found age to be unrelated to burnout levels (Haddad, 1998; Keener, 1986).

Based on the review of social support and burnout research, the main purpose of the study was to examine which source of support is most effective in reducing burnout. Specifically, two questions were formulated: Which source of social support (supervisors, colleagues, friends, spouse, family) would be more closely related to the burnout scale and its dimensions and whether there are significant differences in burnout dimensions among special education teachers due to: gender, age, marital status, or teaching experience.

Method
Subjects
Data were collected from 300 special education teachers holding full-time positions in special classes in public schools or private schools across the seven emirates (Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ras Al-

Kahaimah, Umm Al Qaiwain, and Ajman) as to their views on the sources of social support and levels of burnout. Three hundred special education teachers participated in this study during the second semester of the academic year 2009/2010. Participating teachers were certified special education teachers who taught in primary or secondary government and private schools or centers for children with special needs. Participating teachers were certified special education teachers. There were 250 special education female teachers (83.3% of the sample) and 50 special education male teachers (16.6% of the sample). The age range of the sample was 22-45 years, Two hundred participants were married (66.6%), 90 participants (30%), were single and ten participants (3.3%) were divorced (and not re-married). Years of experience ranged from 4-17 years. The sample was randomly selected and the variables of age, sex, marital status, and years of teaching experience were not controlled.

Measures
Social support. Social support was assessed through a questionnaire designed based on measures used in previous research on social support (Haddad, 1998; Tracy & Whittaker, 1990, & Zimet et al., 1988). The measures focused on support received from five sources of the special education teacher's social network: supervisors, colleagues, friends, spouse and family.

Respondents were requested to rate, on a five point Likert scale, the degree of support received from each of the sources listed above. Potential responses on the 5-point scale are: no support (1), low support (2), moderate support (3), much support (4), and very much support (5).

The questionnaire consisted of 18 items that reflect three aspects of social support. These aspects are: Advice and Guidance (5 items), Acceptance and Belonging (7 items), and Feedback (6items). Reliability coefficients (Cronbach's Alpha) for each source of social support were found to be 0.88 for supervisor support, 0.89 for colleague support, 0.88 for friends support, 0.91 for spouse support, and 0.90 for family support.

The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) as developed by Maslach and Jackson (1986) was administered. The MBI consists of 22 items which cover three subscales: depersonalization (5 items), personal accomplishment (8 items), and emotional exhaustion (9 items). Each item is rated on a 6-point Likert-type scale on the frequency of occurrence and a 7-point scale on the intensity of occurrence only because of the very high correlation between frequency and intensity ratings (Constable & Russell, 1986; Maslach & Jackson, 1986). Maslach and Jackson (1986) reported reliability coefficients ranging from 0.71 to 0.90 for the three subscales. They also demonstrated validity of the MBI in several ways (Haddad, 1998).

For the purpose of this study, the MBI was translated into Arabic and some words were modified to make the items relevant to resource room teachers (see appendix 1). Reliability coefficients for the frequency of Arabic version (Cronbach's alpha) were 0.83 for emotional exhaustion, 0.72 for depersonalization, and 0.86 for personal accomplishment, while the reliability coefficients for the strength of Arabic version (Cronbach's alpha) were 0.86 for emotional exhaustion, 0.60 for depersonalization, and 0.84 for personal accomplishment.

Results
Pearson Correlation coefficients were calculated between scores of each of the subscales of the burnout questionnaire and scores obtained from source of social support: supervisor, colleagues, friends, spouse, and family as shown in Table 1. There was a significant correlations found to be statistically significant.

Table 1. Pearson Correlation Coefficients between Sources of Social Support and Burnout

	Emotional Exhaustion	Depersonalization	Personal Accomplishment
Supervisors	.111	-.018	-.083
Colleagues	.050	.111	.159*
Friends	.085	.017	.013
Spouse	.046	-.033	.005
Family	-.050	-.034	.167*

* Significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Significant positive correlations were found between family support, and personal accomplishment, and between colleagues support and burnout dimension of personal accomplishment as well. No significant relationships, however, were found between supervisors, friends, and spouse support on the one hand and the three burnout dimensions on the other.

The second research question concerned whether there are significant differences in burnout dimensions among special education teachers due to: sex, age, marital status, and teaching experience. In order to address this question, ANOVA, analyses conducted for each variable and the three burnout dimensions. The resulting F values for the three burnout dimensions that pertain to sex, age, marital status, and teaching experience are shown in Table 2. None of these F values were statistically Significant at $\alpha = 0.05$.

Table 2. Analysis of Variance of Demographic Variables with Burnout Dimensions

Demographic Variables	Emotional Exhaustion F	Depersonalization F	Personal Accomplishment F
Sex	.106	.787	.358
Experience	.094	.726	.172
Age	.552	.349	.290
Marital Status	.541	.458	.254

Discussion

The goal of the present study was to analyze the relationship between sources of social support at work (from supervisors, colleagues, friends, spouse, or family). Those sources of support were assumed to be more closely related to the burnout scale and its dimensions among special education teachers due to: gender, age, marital status, and teaching experience.

The most important finding of this study was the positive relationship between family support and the personal accomplishment dimension of burnout, and the relationship between colleagues' support and sense of personal accomplishment. The significant relationship between family support and the personal accomplishment reflects the importance of family in United Arab Emirates society. The family, which is the most important unit to Arabs, satisfies many affiliation needs. It provides its members with love, affection, advice, feedback, and practical assistance. The family is considered the most accessible and preferred source of assistance for Arabs. Thus, it is easier for them to accept help from members of their natural networks than from strangers. In general, family bonds are extremely strong, and the individual relies on family for social, emotional and material support. This is an important cultural aspect that may be further highlighted through a comparison with Western cultures.

Contrary to Arab culture, Western cultures rewards *individuality, independence, self-reliance, autonomy, and freedom* (Dillard, 1983, p.15). Westerners often stress *less reliance on the family for support, advice, and encouragement* (McClintock, 1974, p. 348). This result is consistent with the findings of Platsidou and Agaliotis (2008); Bataineh (2005); Haddad (1998); Rimmerman (1989) who found that family support was positively associated with sense of personal accomplishment.

On the other hand, collegial support was also found to be positively associated with personal accomplishment. This result might indicate that supportive relations with colleagues provided teachers with help, acceptance, and participation. This finding is consistent with those of Platsidou and Agaliotis (2008), Haddad (1998) and Kruger et al., (1991). However, no significant relationships between the other sources of social support (supervisors, friends, and spouse support) and burnout were detected.

A possible explanation of the absence of a significant relationship between supervisor support and burnout is that supervisors represent authority and do not interact with teachers on an equal basis. It is possible that supervisors are insensitive to teacher-related problems, judgmental, critical and perhaps have a limited view of their role-orientation and professional feedback rather than providing support for teachers. Supervisors usually provide social support of a formal nature (e.g., feed-back information on the task, chances of promotion, praise, etc) The lack of relationship between supervisors support and burnout in this study is consistent with the findings of (Kim, Lee, & Kim, 2009; Chan, 2007; Platsidou & Agaliotis, 2008; Bataineh, 2005; Haddad, 1998; Price & Spence, 1994; Turnipseed, 1994; Kruger et al., 1991; & Rimmerman, 1989).

Regarding socio-demographic variables, results showed no significant differences in burnout dimensions between males and females. Perhaps this is due to the homogeneity of the sample, and to the fact that both males and females are placed in similar life and work conditions. These results are consistent with previous research (Kim, Lee, & Kim, 2009; Chan, 2007; Platsidou & Agaliotis, 2008; Bataineh, 2005; Haddad, 1998; Ross et al., 1989) which reported that there were no statistically significant differences in burnout dimensions between males and females.

In addition to that, there were no significant differences in burnout levels in respect to marital status and teaching experience. These findings contradict other burnout studies (Ross et al., 1989; Kruger et al., 1991) which found out that fewer years of experience resulted in more burnout; but support Russell et al., (1987) who suggested that married teachers experienced less burnout. This result is consistent with the findings of Platsidou and Agaliotis (2008); Bataineh (2005) and Haddad (1998) who found that there were no statistically significant differences in burnout levels in respect to marital status and teaching experience.

Also, it was found that there were no statistically significant differences in burnout levels in respect to age. This result is consistent with the findings of Bataineh (2005) and Haddad (1998) and Keener (1986).

Conclusion and implications
The present study was designed to investigate the relationship between social support and the dimensions of burnout among special education teachers in the United Arab Emirates. Teachers who participated in this investigation were able to elaborate on causes, effects, and current problems that bring about burnout in the teaching profession. In the case of social support, special education teachers who had more social support reported less burnout and therefore had more personal accomplishment.

The findings of this study have important implications for special education teachers in the United Arab Emirates. First, intervention programs in cooperation with the school health personnel can help develop, implement, and evaluate early detection and prevention of burnout through in-service training regarding teacher stress and burnout. An important area for future research concerns designing and evaluating the effects of social support intervention programs in preventing teacher burnout.

Another implication is that if special education teachers are to be the persons designated to provide social skills interventions, training institutions must consider expanding their curricula. Those curricula should include specific training in social skills interventions. Likewise, implementation of professional support networks should be carried out to overcome a sense of feeling isolated in the classroom.

Finally, supervisors must be trained to improve their supervisory skills. The gap between supervisors and school teachers should be bridged so that those teachers are offered assistance whenever they need it. The development of support forms is a major challenge, but alleviation of burnout is critically important for ensuring maximum job performance, health and well-being among United Arab Emirates teachers.

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Sources social support

Supervisor Co – Workers Friends Spouse Family
1 -5   1 -5   1 -5   1 -5   1 -5

1-I like to discuss my work related problems with …………..
2-I feel that my work is appreciated by…………..
3-I have access to get information I need from…………..
4- I feel secure when I talk about my problems with …………..
5-I feel that the most helpful person in getting my work done is…………..
6- I feel secure and safe when I am with …………..
7-I like to share my interests and concerns with. …………..
8-I can be totally myself with. …………..
9-In a crisis situation I can really count on…………...
10-I feel that the person I can count on to console me when I am upset is…………..
11- I have special skills in my work which is appreciated by………….. .
12- When I get exhausted from work I can depend on …………..
13- When I need help count on. …………..
14- The person who really listens to me when I need to talk to someone is …………..
15- I feel the importance of emotional support I get from. …………..
16- I feel that the person who cares about problems I face in my work is …………..
17- I feel I am accepted and loved as a person by…………..
18- I like to get advice and guidance when it is needed from…………..