

p-ISSN : 2708-2113 | e-ISSN : 2708-3608

DOI(Journal): 10.31703/gesr  
DOI(Volume): 10.31703/gesr/.2024(IX)  
DOI(Issue): 10.31703/gesr.2024(IX.I)

www.gesrjournal.com

Global Educational  
Studies Review



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**GLOBAL EDUCATIONAL STUDIES REVIEW**  
HEC-RECOGNIZED CATEGORY-Y

**VOL. IX, ISSUE I, WINTER (MARCH-2024)**

  
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Double-blind Peer-review Research Journal  
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Article Title

Effect of Teachers' Work-Related Burnout on Emotional Empathy at the Higher Education Level

Global Education Studies Review

p-ISSN: 2708-2113 e-ISSN: 2708-3608

DOI(journal): 10.31703/gesr

Volume: IX (2024)

DOI (volume): 10.31703/gesr.2024(IX)

Issue: I (Winter-March 2024)

DOI(Issue): 10.31703/gesr.2024(IX-I)

Home Page

[www.gesjournal.com](http://www.gesjournal.com)

Volume: IX (2024)

<https://www.gesjournal.com/Current-issues>

Issue: I-Winter (March-2024)

<https://www.gesjournal.com/Current-issues/9/1/20234>

Scope

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Abstract

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**Keywords:** Teachers Work-related Burnout, Emotional Exhaustion, Personal Accomplishment, Depersonalization, Workload, Emotional Empathy.

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Pages: 49-58

DOI:10.31703/gesr.2024(IX-I).06

DOI link: [https://dx.doi.org/10.31703/gesr.2024\(IX-I\).06](https://dx.doi.org/10.31703/gesr.2024(IX-I).06)

Article link: <http://www.gesjournal.com/article/A-b-c>

Full-text Link: <https://gesjournal.com/fulltext/>

Pdf link: <https://www.gesjournal.com/jadmin/Author/31rv1olA2.pdf>

Citing this Article

06		Effect of Teachers' Work-Related Burnout on Emotional Empathy at the Higher Education Level					
Author		Iqra Jamshed Almas Shoaib		DOI		10.31703/gesr.2024(IX-I).06	
Pages	49-58	Year	2024	Volume	IX	Issue	I
Referencing & Citing Styles	APA	Jamshed, I., & Shoaib, A. (2024). Effect of Teachers' Work-Related Burnout on Emotional Empathy at the Higher Education Level. <i>Global Educational Studies Review</i> , IX(1), 49-58. <a href="https://doi.org/10.31703/gesr.2024(IX-I).06">https://doi.org/10.31703/gesr.2024(IX-I).06</a>					
	CHICAGO	Jamshed, Iqra, and Almas Shoaib. 2024. "Effect of Teachers' Work-Related Burnout on Emotional Empathy at the Higher Education Level." <i>Global Educational Studies Review</i> IX (1):49-58. doi: 10.31703/gesr.2024(IX-I).06.					
	HARVARD	JAMSHED, I. & SHOAB, A. 2024. Effect of Teachers' Work-Related Burnout on Emotional Empathy at the Higher Education Level. <i>Global Educational Studies Review</i> , IX, 49-58.					
	MHRA	Jamshed, Iqra, and Almas Shoaib. 2024. 'Effect of Teachers' Work-Related Burnout on Emotional Empathy at the Higher Education Level', <i>Global Educational Studies Review</i> , IX: 49-58.					
	MLA	Jamshed, Iqra, and Almas Shoaib. "Effect of Teachers' Work-Related Burnout on Emotional Empathy at the Higher Education Level." <i>Global Educational Studies Review</i> IX.I (2024): 49-58. Print.					
	OXFORD	Jamshed, Iqra and Shoaib, Almas (2024), 'Effect of Teachers' Work-Related Burnout on Emotional Empathy at the Higher Education Level', <i>Global Educational Studies Review</i> , IX (1), 49-58.					
	TURABIAN	Jamshed, Iqra and Almas Shoaib. "Effect of Teachers' Work-Related Burnout on Emotional Empathy at the Higher Education Level." <i>Global Educational Studies Review</i> IX, no. I (2024): 49-58. <a href="https://dx.doi.org/10.31703/gesr.2024(IX-I).06">https://dx.doi.org/10.31703/gesr.2024(IX-I).06</a> .					



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**Title**

**Effect of Teachers' Work-Related Burnout on Emotional Empathy at the Higher Education Level**

**Abstract**

*Teachers' burnout is a contributing factor to many teachers leaving the field of education early in their careers and emotional empathy is also related to teachers' burnout. The factors of emotional empathy are interpersonal emotional empathy and intrapersonal emotional empathy. The objectives of the study were to examine teachers' work-related burnout and emotional empathy at higher education levels and to investigate the effect of teachers' work-related burnout on emotional empathy at higher education levels. The research design is based on causal-comparative. The population of the study includes teachers' of social sciences and humanities from different public and private universities in Lahore. 100 teachers were selected by using a multi-stage sampling method. Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) and Toronto Empathy Questionnaire were used to conduct the study. The results show that teachers' work-related burnout hurts teachers' emotional empathy*

**Keywords:** Teachers Work-related Burnout, Emotional Exhaustion, Personal Accomplishment, Depersonalization, Workload, Emotional Empathy

**Introduction**

Burnout is a condition that includes a state of mental, emotional, and physical weariness that results in stress and

unfavourable feelings toward one's job and self-efficacy (Herman et al., 2017). The symptoms of burnout are anxiety, depression, feeling tired or drained most of the time, feeling



helpless, overwhelmed, focusing problems, tension, nausea, headache, fatigue, insomnia, emotional and mental exhaustion, and many more.

Teachers who are going through burnout are thought to be inactive and sensitive toward their students (Cherniss, 1980; Drew, 1986). Different countries and educational contexts face multiple challenges when it comes to teacher burnout (Durr et al., 2014; Marek et al., 2017).

One of the main issues facing the global education system is teacher turnover. Due to stress and burnout, hundreds of teachers quit their jobs every year or are unable to continue just because of stress and burnout (Ingersoll, 2012). Many educators quit before realizing their full potential due to severe burnout symptoms and stress that affect their personal lives.

Teachers' burnout not only affects teachers' lives but also affects the education environment as a whole. Teachers' burnout causes teachers turnover which impacts students learning outcomes and academic achievements (Ronfeldt, et al, 2013). Adds more burden and duties on retired or elderly teachers and disturbs the whole school community (Bruch et al, 2011).

Empathy is having the ability to comprehend and relate to the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of others. It is having the ability to place oneself in another person's position, connect with their feelings, and react in a way that is sincere and compassionate

There are three types of empathy; emotional empathy, cognitive empathy, and compassionate empathy. Baron Cohen and Wheelwright (2004) also stated that empathy is about feelings that what other people's thoughts and feelings, the feeling can be negative or it may be positive.

Affective empathy is a proper feeling that an observer has about another person's emotional condition, whereas cognitive empathy is the capacity to understand and see things from another person's point of view. It is clear from the definitions of empathy why it is important to teachers. Empathy plays a significant role and professionals like instructors need to possess empathy.

Teachers and other professionals who work with people can benefit from having emotional empathy in their work (Goroshit & Hen, 2016). Empathetic teachers strengthen their students' ability, and sense of belonging to their institute, develop a good relationship with their peers and students, and enhance their confidence (Schutz & Decuir, 2002). Teachers

who possess emotional empathy are better able to relate to their students and foster a healthy learning environment. Teachers may become emotionally exhausted over time. Teachers who are frequently in emotionally taxing circumstances may be more at risk for burnout. (Tei, et al, 2014).

Burnout directly affects teachers' effectiveness in the classroom. Exhaustion, cynicism, and a sense of inefficacy decrease their ability to engage with students and provide them with quality education (Maslach, et al., 2009; Klassen, et al., 2012). For teachers who are facing burnout, it is difficult for them to create a positive learning environment, as a result, it can negatively impact student motivation, engagement, and academic results (Johnson, et al, 2005; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). Burnout can also lead to decreased job satisfaction and increased turnover rates among educators. Teachers experiencing burnout are more likely to leave the profession which is an alarming situation that many schools are facing (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Hakanen, et al, 2006)

The emotional empathy gap can result in teachers less paying attention to the emotional needs of their students. This may also decrease their ability to provide emotional support, which is important for a positive learning environment. (Hoffman, 2001); Brackett, et al, 2010). Burnout and emotional empathy also affect the relationships between teachers and students. As a result, it may decrease the trust level, communication, and overall sense of safety and support within the classroom (Hughes, et al, 2012; Keller, et al, 2014). It's important to note that addressing teachers' burnout and emotional empathy is important for the well-being of teachers and the success of the educational system as a whole.

## Objective of the Study

### The objectives of the study were, to:

- Examine teachers' work-related burnout and emotional empathy at the higher education level.
- Differentiate between teachers' work-related burnout and emotional empathy based on demographic variables at the higher education level.
- Investigate the effect of teachers' work-related burnout on emotional empathy at the higher education level.

## Literature Review

### Burnout

Herbert Freudenberger first explained burnout as a state of both physical and emotional tiredness brought on by prolonged stress in the 1970s. According to (Maslach et al., 1996), burnout is a type of work-related stress that includes depersonalization, emotional exhaustion, workload, and a loss of confidence in personal accomplishment. When you are stressed out it affects your work and professional effectiveness (Arsenault & Dolan, 1983) and the satisfaction you get after working (Duxbury, Armstrong, Drew, & Henly, 1979) as a result the absentees' ratio increases, and attention deficit issues arise (Duxbury & Thiessen, 1979), and illness (Maslach et al., 1996).

### Teachers' Work-related Burnout

Professional burnout has been defined in several ways. However, the feeling of mental, emotional, and physical fatigue brought on by ongoing stress that results in low self-efficacy in one's work life is known as burnout. (Herman et al., 2017).

Teachers' burnout may result in medical and physiological illnesses, job demise, and chronic worry if it is not recognized or treated early. (Marek, et al, 2017). Because of the changes set by modern educational and administrative institutions, such as the increase in workload and pressure on instructors, the teaching profession is becoming chaotic and stressful (Larrivee, 2012). Furthermore, because of an intense shift toward a service economy, education has become an aspect of human capital, requiring lower costs and more productivity from teachers (Schaufeli et al., 2018). As a result, during the 1990s, a detailed amount of study was conducted to identify the causes of burnout and provide useful coping mechanisms. (Schaufeli et al., 2018).

According to (Fives et al, 2017) a teacher's burnout might start as early as the pre-service, student-teaching period of their teaching career. Particularly in their early years of teaching, a large number of teachers quit their jobs for non-retirement-related reasons (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2016). Compared to their older colleagues, younger educators quit their jobs. It is estimated that burnout is responsible for more than half of the thirty percent of young teachers who leave the profession. The exact ratio is still unclear. Many teachers left their profession in search of a new career (Rumschlag, 2017). In their new careers, teachers who used to teach reported a better work-life balance between their personal and professional lives. It also indicates that certain professions

lack the more demanding employment criteria that must be fulfilled outside of the workplace.

Attrition and turnover are caused by burnout, which also harms the work quality, job commitment, and health of the people who suffer from it. It can also harm others with whom they work with (Andrechik, 2019). Burnout affects a lot more than just the individual; it can spread like an infection among employees in a company (Andrechik, 2019).

### Teachers' Burnout Prevention and Control

The effective burnout coping strategies that teachers should implement on their own and the preventive measures that employers should take (Larrivee, 2012; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014; (Herman et al., 2017).

The research evidence recommends the following coping strategies. It is important to remember that teacher burnout is an action rather than an isolated incident. However, efforts should be focused on managing burnout rather than looking for a way to completely eradicate it. As was previously mentioned, teaching has historically been a difficult profession, and burnout can manifest itself in a variety of ways. Probably the most effective course of action is to provide instructors with the tools they need to treat these symptoms. The following strategies suggested by (Chang, et al, 2008) will be effective:

Having positive relationships with administrators and coworkers; getting professional counselling when facing work-related or personal difficulties; allowing a healthier lifestyle that involves exercise, relaxation, meditation, and a balanced diet; learning effective time-management techniques; accepting your flaws and refraining from being excessively obsessive; and maintaining a work-life balance. Make a clear distinction between your work and personal time by prioritizing and setting realistic goals, and then allocating your schedule appropriately (Durr, et al., 2014).

Building support groups and a comfortable friendly work atmosphere; talking with teachers about their issues and providing help when needed; arranging regular workshops on methods to reduce teachers' worry and practice coping mechanisms for burnout; creating an equitable incentive program to boost teachers' enthusiasm; valuing teachers' work by involving them in decision-making procedures.

### Empathy

According to (Shamay-Tsoory, [2010](#)), empathy is the ability to understand the thoughts, feelings, and psychological conditions of another person. It is an essential ability for effective interpersonal communication. Empathy is the emotion that allows people to build and maintain long-lasting relationships with one another (Goodkind et al, 2012).

### Emotional Empathy

Emotional empathy is one of the important skills (Shamay-Tsoory, 2010). Humans are motivated to act kindly toward friends, family, and allies by emotional empathy (Smith, [2006](#)). It has been found that emotional empathy is a key mechanism that depicts noble behaviour (Ashraf, et al., [2014](#)).

It's believed that all humans acquire emotional empathy because it's important for everyone to survive. When we learned that a close friend or relative was experiencing any kind of emotional distress, we too became upset and made an effort to assist them in any way we could to lessen our stress (Smith, 2006).

Gender differences have been observed in emotional empathy levels. Research on empathy from a point of development has revealed that men are more logical and cognitively focused, whereas women are more emotional and empathic (Damon, et al, 2008). Self-report data is a key component of empirical inquiries, which consistently show that females score higher, especially when it comes to problems involving emotional processes like personal pain and empathetic concern (Platsidou & Agaliotis, 2016). Gleichgerrcht and Decety (2013) found that women showed stronger values, which led to a wide range of undesirable feelings. Gender also had a very significant effect on empathic concern. Loyola ([2016](#)) found that empathy in helping professions revealed that women with greater training, marriage, and experience in the teaching field also showed higher levels of empathy.

Additionally, a study by Loyola (2016) on empathy in helping professions revealed that women with greater training, marriage, and experience in the teaching field also showed higher levels of empathy.

According to Rueckert et, al. (2011), differences in overall emotional response might be responsible for women's greater empathy levels. Emotional empathy levels are significantly correlated with age as well. People seem to have more emotional empathy as they get older.

A person's ability to absorb emotional information is negatively affected by sleep deprivation (Ferrara, et al, 2014). In a study conducted on healthy volunteers, Guadagni et al. (2014) assessed the connection between emotional empathy and sleep deprivation. They found that there was less emotional empathy among those participants who were in the sleep-deprived group.

### Teachers' Emotional Empathy

Fostering emotional empathy to develop a positive learning environment is an essential teaching ability (Cooper, [2004](#)). Every day, teachers work with students who have a wide range of skills, personalities, cultures, and worldviews. It has been suggested that empathy is one trait that sets exceptional teachers apart from their less proficient colleagues (Chezare, 2015).

Empathic teachers can enhance their students' sense of community within their schools, their relationships with peers and teachers, and their self-assurance in the classroom (Goroshit & Hen, 2016). Emotionally intelligent teachers create and promote positive and productive learning environments that support both academic and personal development. As a result, teaching demands a lot of emotional effort.

Empathy is an essential attribute that allows educators to accommodate the increasing variety observed in most learning environments (Goroshit & Hen, 2016).

### Method

The research paradigm is positivist because it emphasizes the need for observations, measurements, and evidence-based research to gain knowledge about the natural and social world. The most suitable approach for this research is the quantitative approach. The researchers collected data through questionnaires using a standardized scale. The researchers can establish groups of individuals with the independent variable present and then use causal-comparative designs to figure out if the groups differ concerning the dependent variable (Gall & Borg, 2007). Because it enables the researchers to investigate the relationship between the dependent variable (Emotional Empathy) among teachers and the predictor (Teachers' Burnout), this design corresponds to the research objectives.

### Population of the Study

According to HEC, there are a total of 31 universities in Lahore. (8 Public Universities and 23 Private Universities). The population of the study includes all teachers of social sciences and humanities. The teachers belong to different public and private universities situated in Lahore.

### Sample of the Study

The sample was selected by using a multistage sampling method. It is a method that involves selecting samples in multiple stages, often to achieve a more representative and feasible sampling approach. In the first stage, 6 universities (3 public and 3 private) were selected by using non-proportionate stratified random sampling. Then in the second stage of the process departments within those

universities were shortlisted. Then researchers selected the Department of Social Sciences and Humanities by using convenient sampling. And, in the last stage, 100 teachers were selected from already selected departments via convenient sampling.

### Research Instrumentation

There are two adaptations of questionnaires to conduct the study: 1) Teachers' Work related Burnout; and 2) Teachers' Emotional Empathy. Both were adopted after proper validation with reliabilities 0.680 and 0.829 respectively.

### Data Analysis and Interpretation

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of Teachers' Overall Work-related Burnout

Factors	M	SD
EE	2.68	0.643
PA	3.79	0.747
DP	2.23	0.763
WL	2.95	0.820
Burnout	2.99	0.687

Note= Emotional Exhaustions (EE), Personal Accomplishment (PA), Depersonalization (DP), Workload (WL)

Table 1 demonstrates the descriptive statistics of teachers' overall work-related burnout and its factors including emotional exhaustion (EE), personal accomplishment (PA), depersonalization (DP), workload (WL), and overall burnout. The table shows that personal accomplishment has the highest mean (M=3.79, SD=0.747). It means that teachers

reported a higher level of personal accomplishment which suggests that most teachers show a sense of personal accomplishment. Whereas depersonalization has the lowest mean (M=2.23, SD=0.763) which shows most of the teachers feel depersonalization. Some teachers experience it at a higher level.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of Teachers' Overall Emotional Empathy

Factors	M	SD
Intra	3.59	0.766
Inter	3.84	0.743
Emotional	3.73	0.687

Note: Intra= Intrapersonal emotional empathy, Inter= Interpersonal emotional empathy

Table 2 shows that interpersonal emotional empathy has the highest mean (M=3.84, SD= 0.743) which describes that most of the teachers show high interpersonal emotional empathy.

Whereas intrapersonal emotional empathy has the lowest mean (M= 3.59, SD= 0.766) describes that most of the teachers show low intrapersonal emotional empathy.

**Table 3***Independent Samples T-test of Teachers' Work-related Burnout Based on Gender*

Factors	Male (43)		Female (57)		<i>t</i> (2,98)	<i>P</i>
	M	SD	M	SD		
EE	2.64	0.654	2.71	0.639	-0.556	0.581
PA	3.79	0.780	3.80	0.728	-0.045	0.965
DP	2.42	0.691	2.09	0.789	2.164	0.030*
WL	3.00	0.844	2.90	0.806	0.645	0.523
Burnout	3.03	0.406	2.97	0.341	0.738	0.473

Note: EE= Emotional Exhaustion; PA= Personal Accomplishment; DP=Depersonalization; WL= workload; and Burnout= Overall Burnout and \* $p < 0.005$

To inspect teachers' work-related burnout on the basics of gender independent samples t-test was used. Table 3 shows that there is no significant difference between males ( $M = 2.64$ ) and females ( $M = 2.71$ ) in emotional exhaustion, as indicated by a non-significant t-value ( $t = -0.556$ ,  $p = 0.581$ ). The personal accomplishment scores are very similar for males ( $M = 3.79$ ) and females ( $M = 3.80$ ), and the t-value ( $t = -0.045$ ,  $p = 0.965$ ) suggests that there is no significant difference between male and female personal accomplishment. There is a significant difference in depersonalization between males ( $M = 2.42$ ) and females ( $M = 2.09$ ), as indicated by the significant t-value ( $t = 2.164$ ,  $p = 0.030$ ).

The workload experienced by males ( $M = 3.00$ ) and females ( $M = 2.90$ ) is not significantly different ( $t = 0.645$ ,  $p = 0.523$ ). The burnout levels for males ( $M = 3.03$ ) and females ( $M = 2.97$ ) show that there is no significant difference, as suggested by the non-significant t-value ( $t = 0.738$ ,  $p = 0.473$ ). In summary, the analysis indicates that there are no significant differences in emotional exhaustion, personal accomplishment, workload, and burnout between males and females. However, there is a significant difference in depersonalization, with females showing a lower mean score compared to males.

**Table 4***Independent Samples T-test of Teachers Emotional Empathy based on Gender*

Factors	Male (43)		Female (57)		<i>t</i> (2,98)	<i>P</i>
	M	SD	M	SD		
Intra	3.48	0.822	3.67	0.719	-1.230	0.222
Inter	3.64	0.838	3.99	0.629	-2.395	0.019 *
Emotional	3.57	0.764	3.85	0.602	-2.027	0.043 *

Note: Intra= Intrapersonal Emotional Empathy; Inter= Interpersonal Emotional Empathy; Emotional= Overall Emotional Empathy, \* $p < 0.005$

Table 4 shows that teachers' emotional empathy on the basics of gender-independent samples t-test was used. That shows that there is no significant difference in the Intra factor between males ( $M=3.48$ ,  $SD=0.822$ ) and females ( $M=3.67$ ,  $SD=0.719$ ), ( $t= -1.230$ ,  $p=0.222$ )

Whereas there are significant differences in both the Inter and emotional factors between males and females. Males have an average ( $M= 3.64$ ,  $SD=0.838$ ), while females have an average ( $M=3.99$ ,  $SD=0.629$ ), ( $t= -2.395$ ,  $p=0.019$ ). This describes that gender may play a role in inter-emotional empathy and overall emotional empathy.

**Table 5***Linear Regression on teachers' work-related burnout and emotional empathy*

	R	R <sup>2</sup>	B	SE(b)	β	t	p
Burnout	0.231	0.044	0.430	0.183	0.231	2.351	0.021

Table 5 shows correlation coefficient (R) measures the strength and direction of the linear relationship between the predictor variable (Burnout) and the dependent variable (Emotional Empathy). In this case, R is approximately 0.231. This suggests a moderate positive correlation between Burnout and Emotional empathy.

The adjusted R-square value of 0.044 indicates that approximately 4.4% of the variability in the dependent variable (emotional empathy) is explained by the predictor variable (Burnout) included in the model. While this suggests a relatively low proportion of variance explained, it still indicates a significant relationship. The coefficient associated with Burnout is approximately 0.430. This means that for every one-unit increase in Burnout, we can expect an increase

of 0.430 units in emotional empathy, assuming all other variables in the model remain constant. The standard error associated with the coefficient estimate for Burnout is approximately 0.183. This represents the average amount that the coefficient estimate is likely to vary from the true population value. The p-value of 0.021 is less than the conventional significance level of 0.05. This indicates that the predictor variable (Burnout) is statistically significant in predicting the dependent variable (emotional empathy).

Overall, it's important to note that the proportion of variance explained is relatively low, suggesting that other factors may also play a role in predicting the dependent variable (emotional empathy).

### Discussion

The result of the study shows a significant negative correlation between teachers' work-related burnout and emotional empathy. Teachers at higher education levels can experience work-related burnout and emotional empathy just like other educators at any other level of education. Teachers at the higher education level face unique challenges that lead to depression and burnout. The factors that may contribute to burnout in higher education include: Teachers often have multiple responsibilities that include teaching, research, and administrative tasks. The pressure to fulfil these responsibilities and to maintain a high standard in teaching leads to burnout (Maslach, 2001); According to (Chang, 2009) there is a high level of competition for certain faculty positions. The uncertainty of job security especially for the lecturers and for the temporary faculty will lead to burnout; In some higher educational institutes, teachers are not provided with adequate resources, such as funding for research, classroom material, and other facilities. (Ahmad., 2014); According to Williams (2015) institutes set high expectations for academic achievement, including research productivity and student outcomes. The pressure to meet these expectations can be intense and contribute to burnout.

It is important for higher education teachers to connect with their students on the emotional level and to understand their needs, supporting them. Empathy is very essential to create a positive learning environment. However, the

emotional demands of teaching can also contribute to burnout if not properly managed (Ryan, 2001). Teachers may invest significant emotional energy in supporting students, dealing with academic challenges, and managing interpersonal dynamics (Smith 2006).

Higher education teachers need to cope with concerns like burnout and emotional empathy, so institutions and teachers must recognize these difficulties and take steps to foster a positive, supportive work environment.

### Conclusion

Burnout is often linked with negative outcomes, such as stress and emotional exhaustion. It usually places a strong emphasis on quantifiable events and empirical observations. As a result, the burnout was examined under a positivism.

Emotional empathy is an essential component of understanding and sharing other people's emotional experiences. In a positivist method, the researchers use quantitative techniques, including data collection, to assess emotional empathy.

Therefore, keeping this importance in mind the researchers examine the effect of teachers' work-related burnout on emotional empathy at the higher education level. The data analysis and interpretation served as the foundation for the conclusions.

The research findings of teachers' work-related burnout show that teachers reported higher levels of personal accomplishment which suggests that most teachers show a sense of personal accomplishment. On the other hand, depersonalization has the lowest mean that shows teachers' feelings of depersonalization. Some teachers experience it at a higher level. The research findings on teachers' emotional empathy show that most teachers show high interpersonal emotional empathy while some teachers show low intrapersonal emotional empathy.

Work-related burnout based on gender shows that males report higher levels of depersonalization as compared to females while there is no difference in emotional exhaustion, personal accomplishment, and workload based on gender. While in emotional empathy both males and females have the same level of interpersonal emotional empathy. Male teachers have higher interpersonal and emotional empathy.

This shows that gender may play a role in inter-emotional empathy and overall emotional empathy. It is also concluded from the result that shows a significant positive relationship between teachers' work-related burnout and their emotional empathy at the higher education level. However, the proportion of variance explained is relatively low, suggesting that other factors may also play a role in predicting the dependent variable (emotional empathy).

#### **Recommendations for future research**

Some recommendations for the future research are given below:

- Examine the possibility of conducting qualitative research in which teachers who are extremely burned are interviewed to identify common themes.
- Teachers' work-related burnout and emotional empathy must be assessed by k-12 teachers of different public and private schools.

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