

# Job Burnout of the Administrative Staff in Tunisia

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## ABSTRACT

The main aim of this research is to evaluate the prevalence of job burnout among a Tunisian administrative population. Burnout is a work-related syndrome which results from person's perception of a distress between the efforts made and the rewards that it receives (Friedman, 1995). In this regard, multiple studies, that address the topic of the worker's mental health, show that employees suffer more and more from exhaustion in their work (Lindblom & al, 2006; Beer, 2001; Alarcon, 2011). Thus, burnout plays a significant part in to increasing dissatisfaction (Wolpin & al, 1991) and decreases engagement (Richardson & al, 1992; 1993). To evaluate the level of job burnout we used Maslach and Jackson's questionnaire (1986) on a population composed of 208 civil servants of the Ministry of youth, sports, women and family in Tunisia. The data analysis of this research shows that the civil servants are suffering from a latent burnout. Our results also indicate that there is a significant difference between exhaustion of the administrative staff and gender. However, there is no group effect between seniority and burnout. Therefore, the burnout prevention must obviously among the prerogatives of the health public policy in Tunisia.

**Keywords:** Prevalence, burnout, administrative staff

## INTRODUCTION

Today, the working conditions have been degraded in our society. Indeed, work is less physically strenuous. But the human activity has become a social issue and of major competitiveness for organizations. These new forms of work organization (constraints, pressure, exhaustion and job insecurity) result in obvious problems at the workers' mental health (Dejours, 1993; De Gaulejac, 2005; Forest, 2007; Gervais, 1991; Morin, 1996; Vézina & Malenfant, 1995; Truchot, 2004). Maslach & al (1996, 2001) consider that the fact of having few resources and significant work requirements promotes emotional exhaustion, the depersonalization

and reduced personal self-fulfillment. Emotional exhaustion refers to the feeling of having exhausted one's emotional resources so the individual can be described as too, tired and lacking in energy. As for depersonalization, it refers to a negative and insensitive attitude, very detached and dehumanizing towards clients and their needs. Finally, decrease in the sense of personal accomplishment refers to a decline in sense of competence and achievement towards works. The term "Job Burnout" corresponding to the concept of professional exhaustion at the workplace emerged in scientific literature in the mid-70s in the United States in two articles written by Freudenberg (1974, 1975). For the latter, job burnout is a condition caused by the excessive use of energy and resources, that is characterized by a sense of failure, exhaustion, lack of motivation, feelings of ineffectiveness and even a sense of failure. The studies on burnout is typically and particularly found within health professionals (doctor, caregivers and paramedics), to educators and members of the judiciary (lawyers, judges) (Evers & al, 2002; Truchot, 2003). It is acknowledged that burnout can

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be considered as the gap between the professionals' expectation and everyday reality in the world of work (Farber, 2000). In this regard, multiple studies, address the issue of this new "epidemic" (Forest, 2007). They show that employees suffer more and more from loss of energy, stress, low morale and an inability to respond to the demands of their work (Beehr, 2001). According to a survey carried out in Tunisia (Aloulou & al, 2013), more than two thirds of nurses (69%) are affected by burnout (45.8%) of them have a high level of emotional exhaustion, 36.6% have a high level of depersonalization and 22.5% have a low level of professional achievement. The excessive workload, being the major cause of job burnout for about three quarters (72.5%) of caregivers. In a research made on a Tunisian medical and paramedical staff working in psychiatric hospital, the emotional exhaustion among nurses was 35.8% (Halayem-Dhouib, Zaghoudi & al, 2010). The sociodemographic factors (Fortin & Vanier, 1998; Maslach, 1982) seem to play a less significant role in explaining the variance of burnout, suggesting that it is a more social than individual phenomenon (Maslach & al, 2001). Some studies indicate that women tend to be more emotionally exhausted than men (Lindblom & al, 2006; Ahola & al, 2009) and more strongly exhausted when they were young or professionally inexperienced (Bakker & al, 2002). However, men tend to live more often from depersonalization (Maslach, Schaufeli, Leiter, & al, 2001; Schaufeli and Greenglass, 2001). Similarly, among the findings made by Carrier and Roskies (1993), it was mentioned that there is a link between mental health of women and the fact of being employed. Thus, women employed in an administration must not only meet the requirements her profession but also assume her family as well as parental responsibility (Déraps, 2008; Premji, 2002). Indeed, men tend to be more tenacious, while women resort to outside factors trying to find social support and interact with each other to reduce the level of exhaustion (Schaufeli & Greenglass, 2001; Truchot, 2004). The studies of Schaufeli, Enzmann (1998) and Evans & al (2006) conclude that cynicism is a dimension that is more strongly associated with men, whereas emotional exhaustion is most strongly associated with women (Maslach & al, 2004; Ahola & al, 2006a). However, some authors argue that the prevalence of burnout doesn't change according to gender (Gillespie & Numerof, 1991; Ahola & al, 2006b; Ahola & al, 2008a; Sundin & al, 2007). Finally, some studies have also concluded that women as well as men are immediately affected by stress (Chanlat,

1986a, 1986b, 1985; Priscilla, 2000). In contrast, the consumption of antidepressants, tranquilizers and psychotropic drugs were increasingly familiar to women. Contradictory conclusions initiate solicited studies regarding the relationship between seniority and burnout. The administrative staff beginning their careers have a greater tendency to be prone to burnout (Maslach, Leiter & Schaufeli, 2009; Truchot, 2004). Indeed, burnout is positively related to job seniority (Rogers et Dodson, 1988; Schulz, Greenley & Brown, 1995). Truchot (2004) also argues that the "burnout" is observable during the first three years of work. On the other hand, other studies report a negative relationship, those less experienced proving to be more vulnerable to burnout (Ackerley & al, 1988; Capel, 1991). Moreover, the risk of experiencing distress increased significantly with the number of years of seniority (Smith, 2001; Smith & al, 2008). Maslach & al (2001) and Schaufeli & al (1998) concluded that burnout is predominantly observed among young employees and that syndrome appears to occur more at the beginning of career. These results could be explained by various factors such as the shock of entering the labor market, a poor development of social network in the workplace or by the "survivorship bias". In fact, workers have already experienced burnout quit their job, leaving behind workers with lower levels of burnout. Thus, the cumulative nature of stress process favor by chronic exposure to psychosocial factors in the workplace, a deterioration of health (Johnson & al, 1988; Kivimaki & al, 2002, 2006). On the other hand, the major changes that the world has suffered of work in the last decade, notably the necessity to continuously acquire new knowledge and to be flexible in carrying out one's work, are less affecting young workers than older workers, who generally hold lower level of education (Ahola & al, 2006).

## METHODS

### Participants

Our population of study is made up of 208 Tunisian professionals from various administrations of the Ministry of youth, sports, women and the family. The average age is 38.34 with a standard deviation of 8.613 (Table 1). The population of study is composed of 60.1% male and 39.9% female. 70% were married while 24% were single and 1% was divorced. The minimum number of years of experience of participants was less than 5 years and maximum 20 years.

We used the technique of accidental sampling. Thus, the choice of respondents is based on availability or immediate accessibility. That is to say, the person is located at the right time and right place. Data entry and statistical analysis were performed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) in its 21<sup>th</sup> version. For comparison of variables, we used the ANOVA test.

**Measures**

Burnout was measured using the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI, translated into French by Canoui and Mauranges (2008) which is intended for use in human service work (Maslach and Jackson (1986). The emotional exhaustion subscale comprised nine items, the depersonalization subscale five items, and the personal accomplishment subscale seven items. The items are scored on a seven-point frequency rating scale ranging from 0 (“never”) to 6 (“daily”). High scores on emotional exhaustion and depersonalization and low scores on personal accomplishment are indicative of burnout. Conversely, a low degree of burnout reflected by low scores of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization and a high score on personal accomplishment.

**Procedure**

The award of questionnaires took place during the month of June 2013. The questionnaires were distributed in different Tunisian cities (Tunis, Sfax, Mahdia, Monastir, and Sousse). We asked respondents to complete the questionnaire in their own time to ensure that the answers will be given in any conformability. It should be noted that individuals have participated in this research voluntarily.

The experimenters described the goals and methods of the study to the director of administrative staff. The experimenters informed subjects that the study was an outside research project examining the prevalence of job burnout.

**RESULTS**

The calculation of the indices of the scale of Maslach Job Burnout (MBI) (1981) reveals that the administrative staff of the Ministry of youth, sports, women and family has a latent burnout (depletion) whether it is by relation to gender, marital status and seniority (Table 2). That is to say, a burnout that can be triggered any time, with

a high score to the two first dimensions (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization) and a moderate score at the final dimension (lack of personal accomplishment). Indeed, the administrative staff are affected by burnout (latent burnout) 70.2% of them have a high level of emotional exhaustion (fatigue, exhaustion and lack of energy), 62.2% have a high level of depersonalization (negative attitude, insensitive and dehumanized) and 87% have a moderate level of personal accomplishment (decline in feeling of competence and achievement towards work).

The data analysis of burnout syndrome and gender (Figure 1) shows that gender influences neither personal accomplishment nor depersonalization ( $F=3.027$ ,  $dl=206$  à  $p=.083$  vs  $F=1.425$ ,  $dl=206$  à  $p=.234$ ). In contrast, there is a group effect between gender and emotional exhaustion in favor of men ( $\bar{x}=3.61$  vs  $\bar{x}=3.45$ ) ( $F=5.457$ ,  $dl=206$ ,  $p<.05$ ).

The data analysis of the burnout and seniority (Figure 2) shows that despite the difference in average, seniority doesn't influence burnout (emotional

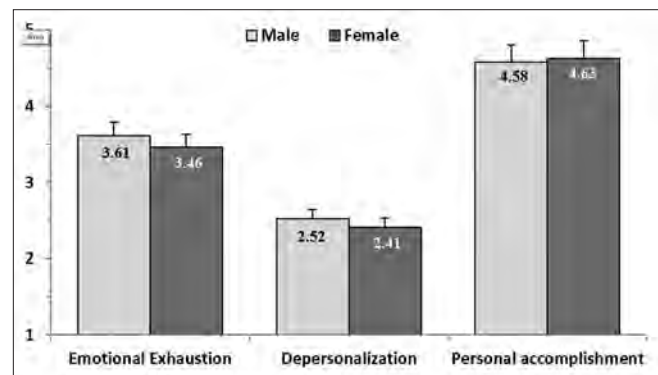


Figure 1: Sex effect on burnout

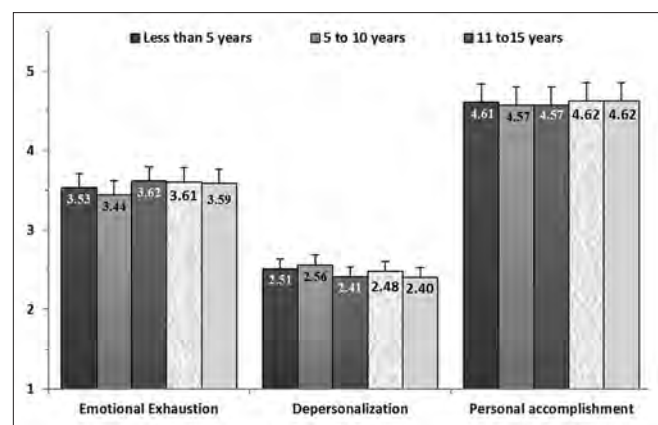


Figure 2: Effect of seniority on burnout

exhaustion, depersonalization and accomplishment). They respectively have:  $F=0.999$ ,  $dl = 203$  à  $p=.414$ ;  $F=0.427$ ,  $dl=203$  à  $p=.785$  et  $F=0.534$ ,  $dl=203$  à  $p=.711$ .

## DISCUSSION

The level of burnout was high in 26.1% of cases. This rate joined the literature data. The prevalence of high burnout level varies from 5 to 50% [3, 5-9]. This variability in results can be explained by methodological and socio-professional differences of the populations studied (culture, lifestyle, working hours, marital status, etc....). Tunisian studies on burnout are rare: in a Tunisian study carried out on medical and paramedics personnel working in a psychiatric hospital, emotional exhaustion among nurses as 35.8% [10]. This frequency was lower than that found among our population (45.8%), which could be explained by the

heterogeneity of our sample made of nurses working in several services. Our population presents a latent burnout rates with high level of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization and a moderate level of personal accomplishment. Our results are not consistent with the studies of Dumas (1993) and Fortin & Vanier (1998) respectively on participants working in the field of drug addiction and mental health showed that they were living a moderate degree of burnout. Indeed, this period (revolution 2011) was marked by significant changes in the Ministry, with a high workload and some difficulties in administrative tasks, making the employees suffer from loss of energy, stress, low morale and an inability to meet the demands of their work (Beehr, 2001). Regarding gender, the results of this study show that men are more concerned of burnout than women. They also show a significant effect between gender and emotional exhaustion. These results are consistent with the works of (Van Horn and al, 1997) who conclude that men have a greater proportion to suffer from burnout from the only dimension of emotional exhaustion (Bekker & al, 2005). These results can be explained by the fact that men tend to be more tenacious while women resort to outside factors trying to find social support and interact with each other to reduce the level of exhaustion (Schaufeli & Greenglass, 2001; Truchot, 2004). Similarly, our results are not consistent with the work of (Gillespie & Numerof, 1991; Ahola & al, 2006b; Ahola & al, 2008a; Sundin & al, 2007), who argue that the prevalence of burnout doesn't change by gender. In addition, our results show that there is no significant difference between seniority and the three

**Table 1:** Personal and job demographics (N=208)

	N	(%)		N	(%)
Gender			Experience		
Male	125	60,1	Less than 5 years	51	24,5
Female	83	39,9	5 to 10 years	49	23,6
Marital status			11 to15 years	47	22,6
Married	156	75,0	16 to 20 years	20	09,6
Single	50	24,0	More than 20 years	41	19,7
Divorced	2	01,0			
Age (Years)	Mean ( $\bar{x}$ )		St Deviation		
	38,34		8,613		

**Table 2:** Frequency of burnout among administrative

	Emotional exhaustion		Depersonalization		Personal accomplishment		Results
	Indices	Scores	Indices	Scores	Indices	Scores	
Gender							
Female	31 ,09	High	12,03	High	37,02	Moderate	Latent exhaustion
Male	32,49	High	12,60	High	36,60	Moderate	Latent exhaustion
Marital status							
Single	30,96	High	12,48	High	36,32	Moderate	Latent exhaustion
Married	32,18	High	12,33	High	36,94	Moderate	Latent exhaustion
Divorced	37,00	High	13,00	High	35,00	Moderate	Latent exhaustion
Seniority							
Less than 5 years	31,78	High	12,54	High	36,86	Moderate	Latent exhaustion
5 to 10 years	31,00	High	12,79	High	36,59	Moderate	Latent exhaustion
11 to15 years	32,55	High	12,06	High	36,59	Moderate	Latent exhaustion
16 to 20 years	32,45	High	12,40	High	37,00	Moderate	Latent exhaustion
More than 20 years	32,29	High	12,02	High	36 ,97	Moderate	Latent exhaustion

dimensions of burnout. Our results are not consistent with the works of (Rogers & Dodson, 1988; Schulz, Greenley and Brown, 1995) who argue that burnout is positively related to seniority. These results could be explained by the major changes that the world of work has suffered in recent decades, notably the necessity to continuously acquire new knowledge and be flexible in carrying out one's work are less affecting young workers than the older workers, they generally hold lower level of education (Ahola & al, 2006).

## CONCLUSION

This research aims to evaluate the prevalence of burnout in an administrative Tunisian population. To assess the level of burnout, we used the Maslach and Jackson (1986) "Maslach Burnout Inventory", translated into French by Canoui and Mauranges (2008) on a population consisting of 208 of the administrative staff department of youth, sports, women and the family in Tunisia. The data analysis of this research shows that the administrative staffs are suffering from a latent burnout. Our results also show that there is a significant difference between exhaustion of administrative staff and gender. However, there is not a group effect between seniority and burnout.

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