

Research project

SYSTEABURN_Teacher Well-being: A Systematic Approach to Better Understand and Prevent Teachers' Burnout and Develop Teacher Engagement

Summary

The phenomenon of burnout concerns a growing number of people and has become an important societal problem. Teachers are particularly at risk for burnout, so it is important to better understand the factors associated with teacher burnout. However, only investigating burnout is not sufficient to capture the well-being process, and we need better insight in positive outcomes, including work engagement. Working to reduce burnout and increase work engagement among teachers is important to reduce health costs and improve teaching quality. Based on a recent literature review and the complementary expertise of team research members, this research project offers new insights and is relevant and innovative on three main levels, i.e. on a theoretical (alternative conceptual approach of burnout/engagement, integrative approach including personal and contextual variables), methodological (longitudinal design, crossing of physiological /psychological and qualitative/quantitative data, variable- and person-oriented approaches), and intervention level (interventions on both personal and organizational resources, participative and job-redesigned interventions).

According to job demands-resources (JD-R) theory, teacher burnout and engagement depend on the combination of job demands and job/personal resources. High job demands–low resources result in burnout, whereas high (challenging) job demands combined with high resources results in work engagement. JD-R theory proposes that job well-being can be improved if teachers have access to sufficient job and personal resources. Through training courses, the university of teacher education of the state of Vaud (HEP Vaud) is regularly solicited by schools which have identified dysfunctions and psychosocial risks and would like to reduce them by improving school functioning and teacher resources. Based on systematic and multidisciplinary approaches (psychosocial, physiological, educational), this research project consists of two connected sub-projects (SP) and aims (1) to better understand the development of teacher burnout and engagement (SP1) and (2) to develop systematic interventions based on participative and integrative approaches to prevent teacher burnout in schools and improve their engagement (SP2).

The aim of the sub-project 1 (SP1), based on a longitudinal design during one school year, is to capture burnout/engagement processes including perceived school and class contexts as antecedents (i.e. psychological demands, decision latitude, supervisors/colleagues' support, student behaviours) and teachers' personal resources/vulnerability factors (physical health, self-efficacy, emotional intelligence) as moderators, while controlling for teacher (i.e. professional experience, age, sex, subjects taught, confounding variables) and school (i.e. teaching level, type of schools) characteristics. Based on power analyses, the study aims to

collect questionnaires on 455 teachers from primary and secondary schools at the beginning, at the middle, and at the end of one school year (three waves of data collection) as well as a longitudinal physiological follow-up among 60 volunteers. In addition, interviews will be conducted with 30 volunteer teachers at the end of the school year to improve the understanding of personal and contextual factors related to teachers' burnout/engagement processes.

Sub-project 2 (SP2) aims to contribute to reducing teacher burnout and improving teacher engagement by developing, implementing, and testing participative integrative interventions focused on both the development of job resources (workshops with teachers and direction to reduce psychosocial risks and increase job resources) and personal resources (three at-choice programs: active lifestyle program, mindfulness-based intervention, and workshops on social emotional skills). SP1 results will be used to select the most at-risk schools in which the SP2 will be implemented and to guide the organization-directed and person-directed interventions to reduce psychosocial risks and personal vulnerability factors and to develop the most relevant job/personal resources. Questionnaires will be filled in by at least 20 teachers per person-directed intervention totalling a minimum of 60 teachers, four times, namely (1) before the organisation-directed interventions, (2) before the beginning of the person-directed interventions, (3) at the end of interventions, and (4) eight months later to assess intervention efficacy in short and long term. Such as in SP1, a physiological follow-up will be implemented on the 60 teachers. In addition, semi-structured interviews will be conducted with 5 volunteers per person-directed intervention ($n = 15$), at the end of the organisation-directed interventions and at the end of the person-directed interventions. The control group in SP2 will be based on data collected in SP1 (with similar teacher and school characteristics; $n = 60$). Different types of quantitative (e.g. structural equation modelling, latent class analyses, analyses of variance) and qualitative data analyses (thematic content analyses) will be applied to test the hypotheses.

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