

Full Length Research Paper

Job satisfaction and burnout among Greek early educators: A comparison between public and private sector employees

Nikolaos Tsigilis¹, Evridiki Zachopoulou² and Vasilios Grammatikopoulos¹

¹ University of Thessaly, Greece ² AlexandrioTechnological Educational Institute of Thessaloniki, Greece.

Accepted 27 October, 2006

The purpose of the present study was to examine perceived levels of burnout and job satisfaction of Greek early educators, across public and private sector. One hundred and seventy eight childhood educators participated in the study. 108 were working in the public sector, 67 in private sector, whereas three did not respond. Participants were administered the Employees Satisfaction Inventory (ESI, Koustelios and Bagiatis, 1997) and the emotional exhaustion subscale of the Maslach's Burnout Inventory (MBI, Maslach and Jackson, 1986). Results showed that early educators experienced moderate levels of emotional exhaustion. Public sector early educators were more satisfied from the job itself and their immediate supervisor than their counterparts in the private sector. Regression analysis showed that job satisfaction facets which contributed to early educators' burnout varied as a function of their workplace. In particular, satisfaction from the nature of the job and working conditions negatively contributed to the prediction of public sector early educators' emotional exhaustion levels. On the other hand, increased levels of satisfaction from the nature of the job and immediate supervisor were associated with reduced private sector early educators' emotional exhaustion levels.

Key words: job satisfaction, burnout, emotional exhaustion, early educators, Greece.

Introduction

Undoubtedly work has a central role in people's life. Apart from the fact that it occupies a lot of their time, it also provides the financial basis of their lifestyles. Thus, the context of employees' job should be attractive and contribute to their satisfaction. It is believed that satisfaction at work may influence various aspects of work such as efficiency, productivity, absenteeism, turnovers rates, and intention to quit, and finally employees' well-being (Baron, 1986; Maghradi, 1999).

This premise holds for a variety of employees, including qualified educational staff. Indeed, educators' well-being has serious implication for the quality of the education they provide (Fenech, 2006; Maslach and Leiter, 1999; Stremmel et al., 1993). Satisfied teachers expected to hold their jobs longer, to be able to engage in more responsive, positive and consistent interaction with children, and to influence positively students' performance (Maslach and Leiter, 1999). Thus, it is easy to understand why burnout and job satisfaction among teachers continues to be an enduring research issue.

According to Lease (1998) job satisfaction can be viewed as the degree of an employee's affective orientation toward the work role occupied in the organization. Research on teachers' job satisfaction orientation toward the work role occupied in the organisa-

*Corresponding author. E-mail: tsigilis@uom.gr Tel: (+304310) 47062 M-phone:(+3697) 3026680; Fax: (+304310) 47042.

tion. Research on teachers' job satisfaction suggests that educators are most satisfied from the teaching itself and their supervision and dissatisfied from their salary and promotional opportunities (Dinham and Scott, 2000; Koustelios, 2001; Oshagbemi, 1999). These findings seem to be robust across several different countries and cultural contexts (Koustelios, 2001). As far as early educators are concerned Fenech (2006) reported poor work conditions, low salaries, heavy workloads, unrealistic expectations from managers, low professional status, organizational conflict, and reduced autonomy.

Another important aspect of teachers' well-being is experienced levels of burnout. Burnout can be defined as the inability of the employee to function effectively in her/his job and it has been conceived as a syndrome comprising three distinct elements: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and diminished personal accomplishment (Byrne, 1994; Maslach et al., 2001). It is considered to be the final step of prolonged and extensive exposure to job related stress. Initially research on burnout focused on human services and education where employees work intensively with other people. However, later on it expanded to a variety of other occupations, such as managers or computer programmers as well as non-occupational areas of life (e.g., athletic sports, political activism) (Maslach, 1999). In comparison to different occupations, teaching has been characterized as an extremely stressful profession. Numerous studies indicate that teachers, often suffering burnout. Maslach et al. (2001) reported that teachers have the highest level of emotional exhaustion, whereas the other two components are close to average. Burned-out educators are unable to deal successfully with the overwhelming emotional stress of teaching (Brouwers and Tomic, 2000). This failure to cope can be manifested from impaired performance, absenteeism or various types of personal problems, and the deleteriously impact on the learning procedure (Manlove, 1993).

Although burnout has been conceptualized as a three dimension syndrome, several authors seem to agree that emotional exhaustion subscale is the essential component of burnout (Koeske and Koeske, 1989; Rohland et al., 2004; Shirom and Ezrachi, 2003). The other two dimensions, namely depersonalization and diminished personal accomplishment are regarded as different, but theoretically related variables, which accompany emotional exhaustion (Koeske and Koeske, 1989; Shirom and Ezrachi, 2003). Moreover, past research has showed that emotional exhaustion could predict personal accomplishment and depersonalization (Lee and Ashforth, 1993). Based on the above considerations it is not surprising that emotional exhaustion is often used as the central measure of burnout phenomenon (Stremmel et al., 1993).

The existing body of literature on early educators' burnout show ambiguous evidence. It is well established

that a consequence of burnout syndrome is turnover (Maslach and Leiter, 1999). Although some authors reported high degree of turnover among child care staff (Jorde-Bloom, 1986; Kisker et al., 1993 cited in Boyd and Schneider, 1997; Whitebook et al., 1993), others found low burnout levels (Manlove, 1993; Stremmel et al., 1993). For example, Jorde-Bloom (1986) pointed out that child care work is among the ten-top job categories which have the highest turnover. On the other hand, Stremmel et al. (1993) reported low emotional exhaustion levels for child care centers staff (directors, teachers and assistant teachers) (12.90 – 15.37). Higher burnout levels were found in a study conducted in Canada among child care providers (20.99 for the emotional exhaustion subscale). Thus, the prevalence of burnout among early education staff might vary across different cultural or educational contexts. Additional studies, especially outside Northern America, are needed to address this issue.

Much has been written about teacher burnout and job satisfaction in education. The vast majority of that literature refers to teachers from elementary, intermediate, and secondary education (e.g., Byrne, 1991, 1994; Koustelios, 2001; Koustelios and Kousteliou, 1998; Koustelios and Tsigilis, 2005). However, little systematic research has been conducted regarding early educators (Stremmel et al., 1993). Even more scarce are research activity regarding early childhood professionals working in the Greek educational setting. Early educators have unique characteristics which differentiate them from the other educators. For example, early educators have to teach indoors as well as outdoors. They are expected to be emotionally available and to expend lot of energy over long periods of time. Moreover, the inherent increased mobility of infants creates organizational problems and demands constant alertness for their safety. Additional research activity may offer an evaluation of the levels of burnout and job satisfaction as they exist for early educators and provide the bases for future interventions strategies.

Various factors such as job characteristics (e.g., work overload, time pressure), occupational characteristics (e.g., various types of work), organizational characteristics (role ambiguity, role conflict), background characteristics (e.g., age, gender), personality characteristics (e.g., locus of control, self-esteem) have been studied in relation to both concepts (e.g., Byrne, 1994; Dinham and Scott, 2000; Koustelios, 2001; Maslach et al. 2001). For example Byrne (1994) has examined the burnout in a large sample of elementary, intermediate and secondary teachers in relation to organizational and personality factors. Organizational factors included role conflict, role ambiguity, work overload, classroom climate, decision making and social support.

Maslach (1999) claimed that job factors are more strongly associated to burnout than personality or back-

ground characteristics. Indeed, issues related to the characteristics of the work setting are likely to affect how staff felt about their job and whether they experience burnout. An important job factor, which received little attention, is whether teachers are working in the public or private sector. Given the different work characteristics (e.g., organizational culture, social support) of these two sectors it seemed worthwhile to be studied for differences or similarities in relation to either burnout and/or job satisfaction.

The purpose of the present study was twofold. The primary purpose was to examine the perceived levels of experienced burnout and job satisfaction in a sample of Greek early educators across two different workplaces, public and private sector. The second purpose was focused on investigating which combinations (if any) of job satisfaction facets were more prominent to early professionals' emotional exhaustion.

Method

Participants

One hundred and seventy eight childhood educators participated in the study. Only one was male. Their mean age was 33.94 ($SD = 7.70$) years and they had 7.68 ($SD = 7.57$) years working experience. 108 were working in the public sector, 67 in private sector whereas three did not respond.

Instruments

Early childhood educators' job satisfaction was measured using the Employee Satisfaction Inventory (ESI, Koustelios and Bagiatis, 1997). ESI is a multifaceted instrument for assessing six aspects of employees satisfaction: the work itself (4 items, e.g., My job is worth-while), pay (4 items, e.g., Paid for what I do), promotion (3 items, e.g., Good opportunities), supervision (4 items, e.g., My supervisor stands up for me), working conditions (5 items, e.g., Best I ever had), and organization as a whole (4 items, e.g., The organization looks after its employees). Responses are given to 5-point scale anchored by strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1). Although there are many instruments to measure job satisfaction, ESI was preferred because it has been developed and validated in the Greek cultural context. Several studies seem to support its good psychometric properties, in a variety of professions such as: public servants (Koustelios and Bagiatis, 1997) teachers in primary and secondary schools (Koustelios, 2001; Koustelios & Kousteliou, 1998; Koustelios & Tsigilis, 2005) and academic librarians (Togia et al., 2004).

The emotional exhaustion subscale of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) (Maslach and Jackson, 1986) was used to measure early childhood teachers' levels of burnout. Although burnout is described as a syndrome comprised three distinct components (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment) emotional exhaustion has been characterized as its core element (Maslach et al., 2001). Emotional exhaustion subscale comprises nine items which describe feelings of being emotionally overextended and exhausted by one's work. Each respondent was requested to indicate the frequency of the feeling represented by each item on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 0

(never) to 6 (every day). Higher values on experienced emotional exhaustion indicate higher degree of burnout.

Procedure

The ESI and MBI's emotional exhaustion subscale were administered to early childhood educators. The participation in the study was voluntary. Furthermore, the participants were assured that their responses to the questionnaire would be held in strict confidence and they will be used only for academic purposes.

Results

Prior to main analysis instruments' internal consistency was examined. Results showed that alpha values were .81 for "emotional exhaustion", .67 for "working conditions", .82 for "supervisor", .86 for "pay", .75 for "job itself", .75 for "organization as a whole" and .65 for "promotion". Item deletion procedures revealed that "promotion" internal consistency could be raised to .72 if item #12 was eliminated. Thus this item was excluded from subsequent analysis. Next, scores of each ESI facet were derived by averaging the scores of all items designed to measure its corresponding subscale. In contrast, items designed to assess emotional exhaustion were summed to create the "emotional exhaustion" subscale. Mean values and standard deviations are presented in Table 2. Independent sample *t*-test showed significant differences regarding "pay" and "immediate supervisor", favoring public early educators working in the public sector (Table 2).

Multiple regression analysis with forward selection was employed to predict early educators' emotional exhaustion from the six ESI facets. Two distinct analyses were conducted: one for employees in the public sector and one for employees in the private sector (Table 2). Results regarding public sector early educators showed that two out of the six job satisfaction facets entered in the model. More specifically, "job itself" and "working conditions" accounted for 23% of public sector early educators' emotional exhaustion variance, $F(2, 106) = 14.90, p < .01$. Multiple regression analysis bearing on early educators working in the private sector revealed that "job itself" and "immediate supervisor" predicted 41% of emotional exhaustion variability, $F(2, 65) = 20.84, p < .01$.

Discussion

This study was primarily designed to investigate the perceived levels of burnout and job satisfaction of teachers working with pre-school age children, in the Greek educational setting. Based on the teachers' norms provided by Maslach and Jackson (1986), early educa-

Table 1. Mean values and standard deviations between early educators in public and private sector.

	Public sector	Private sector	Overall	
	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	n ²
Emotional exhaustion	21.22 (11.0)	22.94 (10.0)	21.88 (10.6)	.006
Working conditions	4.06 (.71)	3.93 (.81)	4.01 (.75)	.007
Pay	3.18 (1.13)*	2.23 (1.1)	2.82 (1.21)	.137
Promotion	3.05 (1.15)	3.26 (1.08)	3.13 (1.12)	.010
Job itself	4.47 (.60)	4.33 (.76)	4.42 (.67)	.009
Immediate supervisor	4.34 (.74)*	3.95 (1.02)	4.19 (.88)	.053
Organization as a whole	3.57 (.96)	3.36 (.94)	3.49 (.96)	.008

Note: * p < .01

Table 2. Prediction of emotional exhaustion from job satisfaction facets for the sample of early educators.

	R	R ²	Beta	p-value
Public sector (n = 108)	.479	.230		
Job itself			-.357	.001
Working Conditions			-.242	.009
Private sector (n = 67)	.637	.406		
Job itself			-.450	.001
Immediate Supervisor			-.392	.001

tors seemed to experience emotional exhaustion levels above the average. This finding is in contrast with previous studies conducted among child care staff which reported low levels of burnout. However, Schaufeli and Dierendock (1995) pointed out that one should be extremely cautious when using cut-off points for the classification of burnout levels because these points may vary from country to country due to many social and cultural reasons. Unfortunately, there has not been yet any systematic research to determine specific cut-off points for Greek educators. Therefore, Greek early educators' levels of emotional exhaustion should be interpreted with caution.

Mean values on job satisfaction indicated that early professionals were most satisfied from the ESI facets "the job itself" and "immediate supervisor" followed by the "working conditions". As was expected, they were dissatisfied from the economic compensation they receive. These results are in line with prior studies from various countries (Dinham and Scott, 2000; Koustelios, 2001; Oshagbemi, 1999) and provide additional support to Koustelios (2001) notion that cultural differences may not be existed when job satisfaction is studied. The above findings are encouraging and show that early educators continue to strive to provide high learning environment and have reasons to remain in the field despite the emotional exhaustion they perceive and their dissatisfaction from their salaries.

Comparison between early educators from the two sectors revealed significant differences regarding "pay"

and "immediate supervisor". These differences apart from being significant were also meaningful as indicated by the eta-square values. The interpretation of the first difference is straightforward since early educators in the public sector receive better salaries than their colleagues in the private sector. According to Kantas and Vassilaki (1997) head teachers in public schools have no substantial authority over subordinates. Thus, early educators from the public sector have little reasons to be dissatisfied from their supervisors. In contrast, supervisors in the private sector are usually the owner of the child care centres and consequently have increased authority over them and/or increased expectations from them.

The analysis used in the present study to predict early educators' emotional exhaustion, namely regression analysis with forward selection of variables, enabled to assess the relative importance of various job satisfaction facets. Findings showed a different combination of silent job satisfaction facets in the burnout of early educators, as a function of their workplace. In both analyses a considerable and statistically significant amount of emotional exhaustion variance was explained. Moreover, in both models, satisfaction from the job was found to be a significant predictor of emotional exhaustion. Beta values showed an inverse relationship between these two variables. Similar finding have been reported in past studies regarding child care staff (Stremmel et al., 1993) and seem to suggest that satisfied early childhood staff from the nature of the work is less vulnerable to emotion-

nal exhaustion.

According to Maslach (1999), an important antecedent to educators' burnout is the social support from their supervisors. This proposition has been consistently demonstrated in various cultural contexts such as North America (Maslach, 1999; Burke and Greenglass, 1993), Netherlands (De Heus and Diekstra, 1999), Germany (van Dick and Wagner, 2001) and Australia (Dorman, 2003). The present study found that early educators in the private sector were less satisfied from their administrators in comparison to their colleagues in the public sector. Moreover, satisfaction from "immediate supervisor" significantly contributed to those early educators' emotional exhaustion working in the private sector. This is an interesting finding which seems to suggest different emotional reactions across the two occupation types. Thus, if lower levels of burnout and increased job satisfaction levels is to be achieved administrators should recognise the importance of being more interested and supportive to their employees.

Prior research has shown that poor working conditions affect burnout and job satisfaction negatively (Blandford and Grundy, 2000). In the sample of Greek early educators from the public sector, working conditions significantly predicted levels of emotional exhaustion. Beta values suggested a negative relationship among the two concepts. Similar findings were reported by Stremmel et al. (1993) in a sample of 316 early educators. Fenech (2006) reported that child care professional usually perceive that they work in an environment of poor conditions. As far as Greek educational setting is concerned Kantas and Vassilaki (1997) mentioned that teachers working conditions in the public sector are far from ideal. In particular, they pointed out that school buildings are not in their best possible condition, they frequently used to house two different schools in alternative morning and afternoon shifts (although some efforts have been made to reduce this problem), written administrative tasks can be very boring, as many schools are not computerized. Undoubtedly, job satisfaction in the public sector can be improved and emotional depletion can be reduced if authorities concentrate on providing better working conditions.

In conclusion the present study found that Greek early educators experienced emotional exhaustion levels above average. They were most satisfied from the nature of their work and their supervisor and less satisfied from the salary they receive. Public sectors' early professionals were more satisfied from their compensation and immediate supervisor in comparison to their colleagues from the private sector. Finally, satisfaction from the nature of the job and working conditions contributed to the prediction of public sector early educators' emotional exhaustion, whereas satisfaction from the nature of the job and immediate supervisor significantly associated with private sector

early educators' emotional exhaustion.

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