

## THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERFECTIONISM AND BURN-OUT IN PRE-SCHOOL TEACHERS

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to investigate whether there is a relationship between preschool teachers' perfectionism and burn-out or not. The population of the study, which is a screening model of the causal-comparative type, consists of preschool teachers working in primary education schools in the central districts of the province of Konya. The sample of the study includes 82 preschool teachers working in primary schools selected from this population. "Maslach Burnout Inventory" and "Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale" were used in the study. Pearson Correlation Significance Test and Frequency Analysis were used in analyzing the data. As a result of the study, it was found that the burnout of preschool teachers was at a above medium high level whereas their perfectionism was at a high level. There was a significant relationship between the preschool teachers' burnout and perfectionism in the sub dimensions of burnout depersonalization and in terms of total scores.

**Key Words:** burnout, perfectionism, preschool, teacher, level, relationship

### INTRODUCTION

Known as one of the leading phenomena in modern times, burnout was first used to express the professional crisis that people working in customer services in the USA experienced in the 1970s (Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter, 2001). According to Freudenberger, who was the first person define the term burnout, burnout "occurs when one begins to burn out due to the extreme demands one their energy, power or resources " (Freudenberger, 1974; Suran & Sheridan, 1985). According to Dolan (1987), burnout causes people to feel both personal and professional dissatisfaction. Person experiencing burnout does not want to go to work, doubts his abilities and behaves in a manner that is out of character. Burnout is a factor that negatively affects employees' efficiency, thereby reducing performance (Maslach & Jackson, 1986; Wright & Bonett, 1997; Özen-Kutaniş & Tunç, 2010).

Maslach et al. (2001) defined burnout as a three-dimensional concept; the dimension of emotional exhaustion refers to the exhaustion of an individual's emotional and physical strength; the dimension of depersonalization refers to developing negative and firm attitudes and behaviors towards people with whom one interacts, whereas the dimension of lack of personal accomplishment refers to individuals' feeling of failure and inefficiency at work and in their interactions with people. In Maslach's model, emotional exhaustion is regarded as the cause of depersonalization, and in turn depersonalization is seen as the reason for a feeling of lack of personal accomplishment (Sağlam-Arı & Çıma-Bal, 2008).

Individuals who, due to their job or their profession, have to engage in a unidirectional, that is giving-based interaction with people, begin to feel that they burn out when they think they always give or make sacrifices without getting as much in return (Tütüncü, 2007). It has been observed that individuals experiencing burnout suffer some emotional problems as well as physical ones such as exhaustion, insomnia and headaches (Wright & Cropanzano, 2000; Geurts & Gründermann, 1999; Ersoy, Yıldırım & Edirne, 2001). There are also those who define burnout as a social phenomenon, not as a clinical one like depression (Gibson, McGrath & Reid, 1989).

Burnout is defined as a syndrome that appears in individuals offering services and help to people and involves emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and decrease in personal accomplishment (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Professional groups that operate face to face with other people, serve and help them are considered to be at risk in terms of burnout and teachers constitute one of the most important ones among these groups (Akçamete, Koner, & Sucuoğlu, 2001).

Teaching is a stressful endeavor. Daily interactions with students and colleagues and unending teaching requirements lead to pressure and stress (Frieseon, Prokop & Sarros, 1988). The results of the study indicate that teachers are in constant interaction with students throughout the day and try to meet their needs and this causes pressure and stress (Frieseon, Prokop & Sarros, 1988). There are many studies on teachers' burnout (Pines, 2002; Byrne, 1993; Kırılmaz, Çelen & Sarp, 2003; VVeisberg, 1994; Russell, Altmaier & Van Velzen, 1987). Moreover, studies conducted in the

field of education show that teachers' burnout varies with some independent variables (Sarros & Sarros, 1987; Hock, 1988; Friesen, Prokop & Sarros, 1988; Koustelios, 2001).

Teachers suffering from burnout are at high risk of facing mental and physical problems. This state of burnout may lead to problems even in their marital and family relationships (Guglielmi & Tatrow, 1998; Pierce & Molloy, 1990).

The studies that have been conducted reveal that burnout is frequently observed in developed countries. Many variables such as socio-demographic features, working conditions, workload and personality play a part in the development of burnout (Ahola & Hakanen, 2007; Spector & O'Connell, 1994).

Especially people who spend most of their lives as "workaholics" and live under heavy workload may face "burnout" (Naktiyok & Karabey, 2005) and experience an intense feeling of "life is unbearable". This feeling is often observed in people who work hard to attain success, do more than their share of the work and have no boundaries when it comes to working (Baltaş & Baltaş, 2002). According to Mermann (1990), perfectionism is one of the risk factors for burnout.

Perfectionism is a multidimensional personality trait that evaluates individuals according to personal standards they have themselves set and demands superior performance (Enns & Cox, 2002; Flett & Hewitt, 2002). There are many concepts and definitions with regard to perfectionism (Flett & Hewitt, 2002; Frost, Marten, Lahart, Rosenblate, et al., 1990; Slaney, Rice, Mobley, Trippi, & Ashby, 2001). Although there are some favorable views regarding perfectionism (personal desire, need for accomplishment), there are those that evaluate it as neurotic personality trait (Flett, Hewitt, & Dyck, 1989), and those that show it is related to depression (Blatt, 1995), obsessive compulsive disorder (McFall & Wollersheim, 1979), anxiety (Deffenbacher, Oetting, Lynch, Morris, et al., 1996), anorexia and bulimia (Halmi, Sunday, Strober, Kaplan, Woodside, Fichter, et al., 2000) and panic disorders (Iketani, Kirriike, Stein, Nagao, Nagata, et al. 2002).

Perfectionists may feel that they are under heavy pressure to succeed because they feel that both they and others are obliged to live up to high standards. Therefore, it has been suggested that perfectionism is related to high levels of stress and burnout (Gould, Udry, Tuffey, & Loehr, 1996; Mitchelson & Burns, 1998).

## **METHOD**

### **Study Model**

This study is of the relational screening model, which is one of the general screening models. Relational screening models are models that aim at determining the presence and degree of change between two or more variables (Karasar, 2005).

### **Population and Sample**

The population of the study consists of preschool teachers who work in primary education schools affiliated to the Ministry of National Education in the central districts of the province of Konya. The sample of the study, on the other hand, includes 82 preschool teachers employed in primary education schools selected from this population.

### **Data Collection**

"Maslach Burnout Inventory" and "Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale" were used in the study.

**Maslach Burnout Inventory:** Maslach Burnout Inventory was developed by Christina Maslach (Maslach & Jackson, 1986). There are different forms of the scale for different occupational groups. There are 22 questions in the form that was developed for teachers. Three sub-dimensions are obtained from the burnout inventory, i.e. Emotional Exhaustion (EE), Depersonalization (D), and Lack of Personal Accomplishment (LPA). Of these sub-dimensions, emotional exhaustion consists of 9 items and involves emotional exhaustion of the individual through their occupation. Depersonalization dimension comprises 5 items and includes teachers' behaviors towards students that are devoid of emotion. Lack of personal accomplishment dimension, on the other hand, contains 8 items and determines individuals' feelings of inefficiency. The frequency of feelings about each sub-dimension is determined using a likert type scaling method. Responses are given to each item on a scale ranging from 0; Never and 5; Always. The 3 sub-dimensions of the scale are evaluated separately. In a study conducted by Girgin (1995) to test the reliability of the study, Cronbach Alpha values were determined for each of the three sub-dimensions. These values were found to be .87 for emotional exhaustion, .74 for perception of personal accomplishment, and .63 for depersonalization. Moreover, test-retest reliability coefficients were identified by administering the scale to 120 people from the same group at an interval of two weeks (EE .86, LPA .83, D .63).

**Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale:** Prepared by Hewitt and Flett (1991) to measure adults' perfectionist personality traits, this scale was developed to evaluate individual differences through 3 dimensions, i.e. self-oriented perfectionism, other-oriented perfectionism and socially-prescribed perfectionism. The multidimensional perfectionism scale is a 7-item likert type scale graded from 1 (I totally disagree) to 7 (I totally agree). The multidimensional perfectionism scale was translated into Turkish by Oral (1999) and its reliability and validity were again tested by Oral. In the reliability analysis, for all analyses, alpha reliability coefficient was found to be .91, whereas alpha reliability coefficient for self-

oriented perfectionism was .91, for socially-prescribed perfectionism .80 and for other-oriented perfectionism .73. Moreover, total item correlations of the sub-scales were found to be between .20 and .75 for self-oriented perfectionism, .22 and .60 for socially-prescribed perfectionism and .31 and .52 for other-oriented perfectionism. A high score obtained from the score indicates a perfectionist personality trait (Hewitt & Flett, 1991).

**Analysis of the Data**

Preschool teachers’ perfectionism and burnout levels were given in the form of frequency analysis tables in the study while the relationship between preschool teachers’ perfectionism and burnout levels was analyzed using “Pearson Correlation Coefficient Test”.

**Findings and Discussion**

In this section, data analyses of the preschool teachers who participated in the study with regard to their perfectionism and burnout are given in tables.

**Table.1** Frequency Analysis Table

Variables		F	%
Gender	Female	77	93,9
	Male	5	6,1
Age	21-25	16	19,5
	26-30	15	18,3
	31-35	19	23,2
	36-40	15	18,3
	41-and above	17	20,7
Marital Status	Married	50	61,0
	Single	32	39,0
Level of Income	Low	15	18,3
	Middle	55	67,1
	High	12	14,6

When the genders of the preschool teachers who participated in the study are taken into consideration, it is seen that 77 (93.9 %) of them are female whereas 5 (6.1 %) are male. As for age, there are 16 people in the 21-25 age range (19.5 %), 15 people in the 26-30 age range (18.3 %), 19 people in the 31-35 age range (23.2 %), 15 people in the 36-40 age range (18.3 %) and 17 people at age 41 above (20.7 %). When their marital status is considered, it is observed that 50 of the preschool teachers (61.0 %) are married whereas 32 of them (39.0 %) are single. As far as their level of income is concerned, it is seen that 15 of the preschool teachers (18.3 %) have a low income level, while 55 of them (67.1 %) have a middle income level and 12 (14.6 %) have a high income level.

**Table 2.** Burnout Levels of Preschool Teachers

	Score Range	N	X	SS	Min	Max	Total Score	High Burnout	
Burnout Total Score	0) 00.00-18.85	82	87,04	2,00	84,00	89,00	7137,00	X=75-132	
	1) 18.85-37.71							f	%
	2) 37.72-56.57							42	50.6
	3) 56.58-75.43								
	4) 75.44-94.29								
	5)94.30-113.15								
6)113.16-132.00									

When Table 2 is examined, it is observed that the lowest score that the preschool teachers obtained from the total burnout is 84.00 whereas the highest score is 89.00. The teachers’ burnout mean score is 87.04. When these figures are compared with the score that can be obtained from the scale, the burnout level of the preschool teachers corresponds to “Once a week (4)” range. This indicated that the teachers’ burnout is at a *above* medium high level.

The fact that the preschool teachers' burnout level was at a above medium high level can be explained by the fact that almost all of the preschool education teachers who were included in the sample were female (93.9 %) and, since more than half were married (61.0 %), they had a busy working life and extra responsibility at home. Some studies indicate that female teachers experience more burnout than their male counterparts (Gonzales, 2005; Singer, 1992; Byrne, 1991, 1999).

On the other hand, other studies found that female teachers had higher professional stress and lower personal accomplishment (Rout & Rout, 2002). This is related to the social role theory and expectations of gender roles (Pines & Ronen, 2011).

**Table 3.** Results of Statistics about Preschool Teachers' Perfectionism Levels

	Score Range	N	X	SS	Min	Max	Total Score	High Level Perfectionism	
Perfectionism Total Score	1) 32.00-59.42	82	155,97	4,03	149,00	167,00	12790,00	X=169-224	
	2) 59.43-86.85							f	%
	3) 86.86-114.28							11	11
	4) 114.29-141.71								
	5) 141.72-169.14								
	6) 169.15-196.57								
	7) 196.58-224								

When Table 3 is examined, it is seen that the lowest score that preschool teachers received from total perfectionism is 149.00, whereas the highest score is 167.00. The teachers' mean score from perfectionism is 155.97. When these figures are compared with the scores that can be received from the scale, it is observed that the perfectionism of preschool teachers corresponded to the range "I partially agree (5)". This indicates that the teachers' perfectionism is above the average.

The perfectionism levels of the preschool teachers are above the average. Preschool education is a process of education that covers childhood years extending from birth to early primary education, provides rich stimulating environmental conditions appropriate for the individual characteristics and developmental levels of children of this age, and guides all of their development in accordance with the cultural values and properties (Poyraz & Dere, 2003). Goals for children in different age groups are included in the preschool education program during this process of education. Preschool education constitutes the foundations to attain these goals so as to ensure that children's developmental characteristics are in the best possible state (Genç, 1999). Raising healthy children who exhibit expected behavior depends on knowing children's developmental characteristics and in accordance with these characteristics, what their needs are. Education given without knowing children's characteristics is both difficult and may lead to errors as it is based on chance and thus do harm to them though not intended (Aral & Kandır, Can-Yaşar, 2000). Preschool teachers are one of the influential and important components that are effective on children's behavior within the classroom. Teachers' professional experience, teaching style and the education they have received have an effect on their personality traits (tolerant, authoritarian, perfectionist etc.) (Aktaş-Arnas & Sadık, 2008). It is an expected result that perfectionism of preschool teachers raised with this awareness will increase.

Moreover, the fact that a majority of the teachers were female (93.9 %) may be one of the reasons why their perfectionism was high. According to Yaoar (2008), Cırcır (2006) and Hankin, Roberts & Gotlib (1997), women's perfectionism is higher than men's.

**Table 4.** The Pearson Correlation Coefficient Test Results Regarding the Relationship between Preschool Teachers’ Perfectionism Levels and the Sub-dimensions of Their Burnout Levels

Preschool Teachers’ Total Score for Perfectionism		
Burnout Emotional Exhaustion	Pearson Correlation	-.200
	P	.072
	N	82
Burnout Depersonalization	Pearson Correlation	-.534
	P	<b>.000</b>
	N	82
Burnout Lack of Personal Accomplishment	Pearson Correlation	.176
	P	.114
	N	82
Burnout Total	Pearson Correlation	-.380
	P	<b>.000</b>
	N	82

When Table 4 is examined, it is seen that the relationship between the preschool teachers’ perfectionism and the sub-dimensions of their burnout levels, namely emotional exhaustion ( $r = -.200$ ,  $p > .01$ ), depersonalization ( $r = -.534$ ,  $p < .01$ ), lack of personal accomplishment ( $r = .176$ ,  $p > .01$ ) and burnout total score ( $r = -.380$ ,  $p < .01$ ) is high and significant. According to these results, a high and significant correlation was found between the preschool teachers’ perfectionism and their burnout levels.

According to Zhang, Gan, and Cham (2007) and Leung and Lee (2006), maladaptive perfectionism is positively correlated with burnout. According to Stoeber and Rennert (2005), teachers with high adaptive perfectionism exhibit a lower level of burnout level. On the other hand, teachers with high maladaptive perfectionism have a higher level of burnout.

Self-oriented perfectionism was found to be correlated with a low level of burnout (Appleton, Hall & Hill, 2009; Hill, Hall & Appleton, 2010; Hill, Hall, Appleton & Kozub, 2008). In another study, on the other hand, it was found that teachers’ perfectionism was not correlated with their burnout (Brobst & Zusho, 2008). Kremer and Hofmann (1985) revealed in their study that there was an insignificant correlation between teachers’ burnout levels and their professional personality. These findings are in support of our study.

## CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

When the results of the study are examined, it is seen that the burnout of the preschool teachers is at a moderate level whereas their perfectionism is at a high level. No significant relationship could be found between the preschool teachers’ perfectionism and burnout in the sub-dimensions of burnout and total scores.

On the basis of the findings obtained, efforts should be exerted to determine factors that might lead to Preschool teachers’ burnout, necessary measures should be taken to prevent burnout, teachers and pre-service teachers should be informed of positive and negative aspects of perfectionism through seminars and conferences and teachers should be provided with an awareness about the effects of this personality trait on students. Moreover, future studies may focus on the causes of burnout and perfectionism and studies can be conducted on larger samples from different regions.

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