

## The Impacts of Structural and Psychological Empowerment on Burnout:

A Research on Staff Nurses in Turkish State Hospitals

### LES IMPACTS DE L'EMPOWERMENT STRUCTUREL ET PSYCHOLOGIQUE SUR L'ÉPUISEMENT:

UNE RECHERCHE SUR LE PERSONNEL INFIRMIER DANS LES HÔPITAUX  
EN TURQUIE

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**Abstract:** The aim of this study is to examine the relationship between the level of perceived structural and psychological empowerment and the level of burnout among nurses in health service organizations. Data for the present study were taken from the survey of state hospital nurses. This study employs a series of multiple regression analyses in order to address the effect of the level of empowerment on the level of burnout—as well as the effect of the level of each dimension of structural empowerment and psychological empowerment on the each dimension of burnout. The results indicate that nurses who perceive higher level psychological empowerment and lower level structural empowerment and burnout. In addition to the effect of empowerment or the dimensions of empowerment, it was found that various background factors influence the level of burnout perceived by nurses in the workplace.

**Keywords:** Structural Empowerment; Psychological Empowerment; Burnout; Nurses; State Hospital; Turkey

**Résumé:** L'objectif de cette étude est d'examiner la relation entre l'empowerment structurel et psychologique perçu et le niveau d'épuisement professionnel chez les infirmiers au sein des organisations de services de santé. Les données dans la présente étude ont été tirées de l'enquête sur les infirmiers des hôpitaux nationaux. Cette étude emploie une série d'analyses de régression multiples, afin de contrer les effets du niveau de l'empowerment sur le niveau d'épuisement-ainsi que l'effet du niveau de chaque dimension de l'empowerment structurel et psychologique de chaque dimension de

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l'épuisement professionnel. Les résultats indiquent que les infirmiers qui perçoivent un niveau de l'empowerment psychologique plus élevé et un niveau de l'empowerment plus bas sont plus faciles à être épuisés. En plus de l'effet de l'empowerment ou des dimensions de l'empowerment, il a été constaté que des facteurs divers liés au contexte influençaient le niveau d'épuisement perçu par les infirmiers en milieu de travail.

**Mots-clés:** empowerment structurel; empowerment psychologique; épuisement; hôpital national; Turquie

## INTRODUCTION

Burnout, which is stated to be a professional hazard (Fraudenberg, 1974), is seen as imminent in terms of both individuals and organizations. Defined as the decrease in the amount of psychological and physical energy (Maslach, 2003), burnout decreases or increases depending on the personal and organizational stress factors. In other words, it is thought to be a negative result of the interactions between person and work atmosphere (Ashforth & Lee, 1997; Budak & Sürgevil, 2005; Özdemir, Kılıç, Özdemir, Öztürk & Sümer, 2003; Singh, Goolsby & Rhoads, 1994).

Burnout is a fact seen more in the public workers who have to spend an important amount of their time with other people. These workers face the risk of chronic stress and burnout. Burnout is defined as a syndrome seen among the people who serve support service to the public and a syndrome including emotional depletion, desensitization and decrease in the personal success (Maslach & Jackson, 1981).

The reasons of burnout can be classified as environmental and/or personal factors. The environmental factors that cause burnout may be excessive work load, control, awards, ownership, justice, and values (Budak & Sürgevil, 2005); while personal factors may be personality, control focus, efficiency level, expectations, and demographic features (Uysal, 2007).

Apart from the factors stated above, thought to be significant relations between marital status, length of work, social support, family structure, responsibility, clearness, emotional stability, and burnout (Arı ve Bal, 2008). Burnout is linked to these single factors; it appears as a result of the interactions between these factors, and as well.

While Fraudenger (1974) handle burnout with its emotional side, Maslach and Jackson (1981) term it as three independent sides being emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and decrease in sense of personal accomplishment. Burnout in people arises as a result of increasing emotional exhaustion and depersonalization and of decreasing sense of personal accomplishment (Kaçmaz, 2005).

**Emotional Exhaustion:** It is the side which expresses physical and emotional exhaustion accepted as the basis and debut of burnout. Emotional burnout is mostly related to work stress and is seen among the employees that highly communicate face to face (Akçamete, Kaner & Sucuoğlu., 2001; Yıldırım, 1996). As a result of emotional exhaustion -an internal dimension of burnout- person thinks s/he is not efficient and responsive to the people s/he serves as earlier, and also sees going to work as a torture since s/he thinks herself/himself not being able to bear his/her work one more day and feels tense (Leiter & Maslach, 1988; Ergin, 1993 & 1995; Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter, 2001; Çimen & Ergin, 2001).

**Depersonalization:** Expressing the interpersonal dimension of burnout (Maslach & Goldberg, 1998), depersonalization includes harsh, negative and indifferent behaviors to the other people (Dericioğulları, 2007). It is related to the fact that people show some behaviors like losing business goals and enthusiasm as a result of getting away from himself and his job, being indifferent to the people to be served, showing negative, hostile reactions and others. (Deliorman, Boz, Yiğit, & Yıldız, 2009).

**Low Personal Accomplishment:** Low personal accomplishment, being self-evolutional dimension of burnout, is the fact that person starts to see himself as insufficient and unsuccessful. In other words, person tends to evaluate himself negatively (Maslach, 2003). People who experience this tendency think that they don't make progress in their job; conversely, they think they fall behind; their trials don't work and make no contribution to their environmental changes (Leiter & Maslach, 1988; Singh et al., 1994).

Burnout is an avoidable situation. As a result, level of burnout can be decreased with both some personal and organizational applications. In organizational level, clear statements of tasks, participation of beginners to the orientation programme and on-the-job training, efficient personnel plan in relation to the features of departments, regular team meetings with suggestions and criticisms, access to social support, participatory environment and sources may be helpful in preventing burnout (Kaçmaz, 2005; Schulz, Greenley & Brown, 1995; Lundy & Younger, 1994; Poulin & Walter, 1993). In personal level, encouraging employees to adopt more realistic goals, consequently helping them to lower their self-expectations may be helpful in lowering burnout (Özçınar, 2005).

One of the mechanisms that is successful in raising job satisfaction and assists employees to be more efficient is empowerment. Empowerment can be termed as a process of raising decision-making rights and help employees self-develop with the help of solidarity, sharing, and team work (Koçel, 2007). Empowerment is the act of enforcement about the individual's belief of own efficiency (Conger, 1989). By this way, elaboration helps people be motivated by helping them turnover their potential and make them feel self-confident which accelerate the performance (Coşkun, 2002).

The term "empowerment" is handled in two separate ways: first are management applications (Kanter, 1977; Laschinger, Shamian & Thomson, 2001a) and, second is in which way these applications are understood by the employees (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990; Spreitzer, 1995). However, the ideal one is handling the two ways together. When the subject is handled in view of executive applications, it's aimed to develop the circumstances needed for empowerment; but the employees' perception is neglected. Empowerment contains the issues how the executive applications are perceived and how the employees see themselves. In other words, since empowerment has psychological, workplace circumstances may be perceived differently among the employees (Bolat, 2003).

Empowerment, when thought to be a way of relations, means the transfer that stronger person makes to the weaker ones when compared, and when it is handled in terms of motivation it is thought to be a psychological investment about increasing the employees' commitment to work and emotions with the work and workplace (Spreitzer, 1995).

On the basis of social-structural approach there are social power terms. While Astley and Sachdeva (1984) state that power comes from hierarchic authority, control of sources, and centralist structure, Mintzberg (1983) thinks power as the ability to affect the organizational outputs.

Organizations may change organization policies, processes, and applications by enabling the sharing of power, knowledge, information, and awards in organizational hierarchy. Therefore the focus of social-structural empowerment is the way to use organizational, social, economical, political and cultural powers to develop a strong empowerment (Çavuş, 2006).

Kanter (1977), states that power can be gained through the opportunities of access to the information and sources, and of support and learning and development. It's stated that these structural factors in the workplace will be more effective (Kanter1993), on attitudes and behaviors of the employee than his personal features, in case that there is no access to these sources, power cannot be gained (Laschinger, Finegan, Shamian & Wilk, 2004) and there will be no work efficiency.

**Opportunity** shows the environment for learning and development. **Access to knowledge** shows the permanence of access to knowledge needed for the employee to do his job effectively, **access to sources** shows the time, source and equipment that the employee needs in order to do his job in best way. **Support** may be termed as the positive feedback that the employee gets from his managers and from the ones that he commands.

In this view of empowerment, behavior of employees is just a response to the structural conditions in the work setting. Therefore, the qualities of a job and its context elicit behaviors from those in a job position that determine the chance of success (Kanter, 1993). When the organization is organized to support opportunity and power to all employees across all organizational levels, behavior of employees becomes more effective, and organizational output increases and improves (Manajlovich, 2007).

Spreitzer (1992, 1995 and 1997) focuses on the psychological empowerment in the workplace and evaluates this in the four dimensions that Thomas and Velthouse (1990) have stated. He explains these dimensions: meaning, competence, self-determination and impact.

**Meaning** implies the consistency between the work and the belief, values, and ideas of the employees. **Competence** is that the employee has the ability and belief to perform the necessities of the work to be done. **Self-determination** means that a person can decide on his own, determine his future (free determination), and behave free. It can also be termed as the control power of an individual on his job. **Impact** is the level of affecting operational, strategic, and executive outputs about work.

Psychological empowerment reflects an active orientation to work, and pass on the notion that individuals not only want to, but are able to, shape their work role and context (Boudrias, Gaudreau & Laschinger, 2004). Psychological empowerment is a process because it begins with the interaction of one's personality characteristics within the work environment; then the interaction of environment with personality shapes the empowerment cognitions, which in turn motivate individual behavior (Spreitzer, 1995; Manajlovich, 2007).

The studies on structural and psychological empowerment show that there are strong relations between job efficiency (Laschinger & Wong, 1999), job satisfaction (Laschinger & Havens, 1996; Manojlovich & Laschinger, 2002), organizational commitment (McDermott et al., 1996; Laschinger, Finegan, Shamian, 2001b), organizational reliance (Laschinger et al., 2004), stress (Laschinger, Wong C, McMahon L, Kaufmann, 1999) and burnout (Laschinger, Finegan, Shamian & Casier, 2000).

The main aim of the present study was to investigate the relationship between structural and psychological empowerment in the workplace and the dimension of burnout. Previous studies which about empowerment and burnout and relation that have been studied in North American context. The importance of this study is being an article which is performed in different cultural context.

## METHOD

### Sample

The original sample consisted of 220 nurses randomly selected from the two state hospitals in the East Mediterranean Region of Turkey. Surveys were distributed to nurses with a descriptive cover letter and were asked to fill out questionnaire in their free times. Surveys were collected after two weeks. One hundred and ninety-four useable questionnaires (89% return rate) were included for analysis in this study. The mean age of the nurses was 32.7 (min. 21 years and max. 49 years, SD 5.044). On average, they have 10.9 (Min: 1 years and max: 30 years, SD: 5.044) years of nursing experience. All of them were female and worked full time.

### Questionnaires

Three self-report scales were used in this study: the Structural Empowerment Scale (Laschinger, Finegan, Wilk, & Shamian, 2000; Spreitzer, 1996), Psychological Empowerment Scale (Spreitzer, 1995), and Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach, & Jackson, 1996). The items for each questionnaire were rated on a five-point Likert scale. All scales had acceptable internal consistency with reliabilities ranging from .6838 to .8888. Respondents were also asked to provide their age and years of nursing experience.

The Structural Empowerment Scale (SES) was derived from measures of the following five components: perceived access to structures of opportunity, information, resources, perceived support, and participative climate. Opportunity ( $\alpha=.6838$ ) and access to information ( $\alpha=.8254$ ) questionnaires derived from Conditions of Work Effectiveness Questionnaire-II (CWEQ) (Laschinger et al., 2000), access to resource ( $\alpha=.7308$ ), support ( $\alpha=.7414$ ) and participative climate ( $\alpha=.7191$ ) derived from Socio-Structural Characteristics of Psychological Empowerment Questionnaire (Spreitzer, 1996). Higher degrees of structural empowerment are indicated by higher scores.

The Psychological Empowerment Scale (PES,  $\alpha=.7193$ ) was adapted using the Psychological Empowerment questionnaires (Spreitzer, 1995). The PES measures reflect the four subcontracts of psychological empowerment: meaning, competence, autonomy, and impact (see Appendix) and it is single dimension. Four items are rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagrees to strongly

agree. Items are summed and averaged to yield scores ranging from 1 to 5. Higher degrees of psychological empowerment are indicated by higher scores.

The MBI (Maslach, Jackson & Leiter, 1996) is a 22-item instrument used to measure the frequency of the three aspects of the burnout syndrome: emotional exhaustion (EE,  $\alpha=.8558$ ), depersonalization (DE,  $\alpha=.6945$ ), and personal accomplishment (PA,  $\alpha=.7301$ ). Burnout is reflected in higher scores on the emotional exhaustion and depersonalization subscales and lower scores on the personal accomplishment subscale.

### Data analysis

Descriptive statistics were computed for all major study variables using the Statistical Program for Social Sciences (Version 16.0). The hypothesized model was tested using Pearson correlation analyses and hierarchical multiple regression analyses.

### Results

Descriptive statistics and reliabilities and correlations for all major study variables are presented in Table 1. It shows that nurses are low level structurally empowered (Mean 2.6, SD .70) and high level psychologically empowered (Mean 3.95, SD .68). Nurses report that while support is the most empowering structure (Mean 3.36, SD .79), they felt not to access to information sufficiently (Mean 2.1, SD .96). At the same time, nurses live low level burnout.

**Table 1: Means, Standard deviations and correlations**

	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1- EE	2,7801	,73122	1								
2- PA	3,7325	,56212	-,267(**)	1							
3- DE	2,2113	,54940	,421(**)	-,071	1						
4- PES	3,9510	,68632	-,263(**)	,308(**)	-,119	1					
5- Opportunity	2,6082	,78194	-,268(**)	,303(**)	-,076	,490(**)	1				
6- Information	2,1735	,96943	-,190(**)	,189(**)	,049	,361(**)	,414(**)	1			
7-Participation	2,3892	,94298	-,323(**)	,215(**)	-,019	,356(**)	,364(**)	,624(**)	1		
8- Support	3,3643	,79446	-,255(**)	,288(**)	-,146(*)	,332(**)	,385(**)	,399(**)	,430(**)	1	
9- Resources	2,5241	,91978	-,261(**)	,199(**)	-,079	,356(**)	,565(**)	,595(**)	,526(**)	,409(**)	1

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Correlation analysis was performed to determine the relationships between structural and psychological empowerment and burnout. Results show that structural and psychological empowerment positively correlates to personal accomplishment and negatively correlates with emotional exhaustion. On the other hand, only perceived support and depersonalization negatively correlates each other.

The relationship model for the three dimensions of the MBI (Emotional Exhaustion, Personal Accomplishment, Depersonalization) and structural and psychological empowerment are presented in Table 2. Two of the models were statistically significant. The third model is insignificant, so we did not expose the table. As can be seen in Table 2, neither age nor profession was significantly related to dimensions of burnout of nurses. Structural and psychological empowerment was not related to depersonalization. Psychological empowerment had a mediating effect between the five structural empowerment dimensions and emotional exhaustion and personal accomplishment.

The participatory dimension of structural amplification seems to have relations with emotional burnout, while opportunity and support dimension is related to personal accomplishment. At the same time, psychological personnel amplification is also related to self-accomplishment. In other words, while

participatory organizational environment decreases emotional burnout, access to the opportunities, support and psychological amplification increases the feeling of self-accomplishment.

**Table 2: Results From the Hierarchical Regression Analyses**

Variables	Emotional Exhaustion			Personal Accomplishment			Depersonalization		
	Step 1 $\beta^a$	Step 2 $\beta$	Step 3 $\beta$	Step 1 $\beta$	Step 2 $\beta$	Step 3 $\beta$	Step 1 $\beta$	Step 2 $\beta$	Step 3 $\beta$
<b>Step 1: Control variables</b>									
Age	-.04*	-.28	-.21	-.94	-.39	-.51	-.12	-.07	-.09
Profession	.01**	.07	.05*	.19	.07	.12	.09	.08	.09
<b>Step 2: Structural</b>									
Empowerment Opportunity		-.09	-.29		.01**	.06		-.03	.01
Information		.26	.21		-.92	-.79		.19	.20
Participation		-.01**	-.02*		.25	.37		.01	.03
Support		-.14	-.19		.04*	.06		-.16	-.15
Resources		-.49	-.47		-.64	-.65		-.10	-.11
<b>Step 3:</b>									
Psychological Empowerment			-.10*			.04*			-.12
Model F	3.049*	5.130**	4.882**	2.204	4.631**	4.629**	.482	1.313	1.408
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.02	.13	.14	.012	.12	.13	-.005	.01	.017

<sup>a</sup>  $\beta$  are the standardized regression coefficients.

\*  $p < .05$

\*\*  $p < .01$

\*\*\*  $p < .001$

## Results and Discussion

The results of the study show that the five dimensions of structural empowerment and psychological empowerment were negatively related to dimension of the emotional exhaustion and positively related to dimension of personal accomplishment of burnout. Thus, higher structural and psychological empowerment corresponds to less burnout. These results are similar to Hochwalder & Bergsten-Brucefors, (2005). These relations can also be rendered to mean that a higher sense of empowerment was associated with less burnout.

Results of this study, as Laschingers and Havens (1996) findings support Kanter's (1977 and 1993) contention that organizational structures within the workplace play an important role in shaping and improving employee work life. The findings show that when hospital managers make organizational structures that empower nurses, they promote a greater sense of fit between nurses' expectations of work life quality and organizational goals and processes, thereby creating lower level burnout.

Participatory organization environment is one of the most important elements of structural and psychological empowerment. Participatory environment helps employees to feel themselves as an important part of the organization (Spreitzer, 1996). In our study, participatory environment was the most significant structural factor which emotional burnout lowers. Perceptions of opportunity and support were significantly related to personal accomplishment. Lack of opportunity and support played an important role on personal accomplishment.

Employee perceptions of the extent to which their work climate is participative rather than authoritarian have important implications for critical work attitudes and behavior. Our findings are consistent with those of Laschinger et al. (1999), who found that staff nurses felt more empowered when leaders' behaviors

promoted autonomy and encouraged participative decision making, in employees. These findings also reassert previous results (Angermeier, Dunford, Boss, & Boss, 2009; Hatcher & Laschinger, 1996) that linked empowerment to respect and lower levels of burnout.

This study presents that psychological empowerment is another important factor affecting emotional exhaustion and personal accomplishment as expected. This result supports DeCicco, Laschinger and Kerr (2006) findings. Nurses experience less burnout as long as they feel themselves powerful. As suggested by Spreitzer, Kizilos and Nason (1997) and Laschinger, Finegan, Shamian and Wilk (2003), our findings show that psychological empowerment has a mediating effect between the five structural empowerment dimensions and the two burnout dimensions. The mediating effect of empowerment especially is apparent between the participation dimension of structural empowerment and the emotional exhaustion dimension of burnout. On the other hand, psychological empowerment has a mediating effect between opportunity-information and the personal accomplishment. This result implies that promoting characteristic in the work environment should result in a higher sense of empowerment which, in turn, should lead to lower degrees of burnout.

This study has some limitations. The measurement of variables was based on self-report measures, which could lead to common method variance between predictor variables and outcome variables. The study was also restricted in its scope, as it only focused on characteristics that affect the burnout of nurses. Many other factors that have been suggested in previous research play a role in the development of burnout in hospitals. The sample size in the present study was small and came from only two state hospitals. The research should be replicated with a bigger sample ranging across different state and private hospitals. This will increase the generalisability of the results. It is therefore suggested that these results be used cautiously.

Despite the limitations of this study, the findings contribute to our understanding of relationship between structural and psychological empowerment, emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and low personal accomplishment in health care settings. These findings suggest that structurally and psychologically empowered health professionals may experience low level burnout.

## APPENDIX

Psychological Empowerment Scale (PES)

The work I do is meaningful and important for me.

I have got necessary skill, ability and capacity to doing my own work

I can decide on my own how to go about doing my own work.

I have a great deal of control and influence over that happens in my department.

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