The Relationship Between Emotional Intelligence and Job Burnout

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the relationship between emotional intelligence and high school teachers’ job burnout in Dezful, Iran. Dezful is a city with about one million residents in Khuzestan province, southwestern Iran. The study subjects were 200 high school teachers that were randomly selected during the 2012-2013 school year. The survey method including Measles’ burnout standard questionnaire and Shrink’s emotional intelligence questionnaire were used for gathering the required data. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and correlation analysis. The data were collected through Likert 5 scales method with Pearson correlation test at level of significance of 0.05. SPSS software version 18 was used for conducting the statistical analysis. The results showed that emotional intelligence plays an important role in determining the teachers’ job burnout and can be used as a major influencer to reduce the job burnout of teachers. The results also showed that the components of emotional intelligence- particularly self-control, sympathy, and self-awareness- have a significant role in predicting the teachers’ job burnout.

INTRODUCTION

Work, is an important part of life, has been the subject of study by many social and psychology researcher. In addition to making money and providing for a living, working fulfills fundamental needs of individuals such as mental and physical exercise, social relationship, self-confidence, self-value, and sense of adequacy and competence. However, work may also be the major source of psychological pressure [16].

In fact, people spend a major part of their life at work during the time they are awake and working has a deep effect on their physical and mental health, hence on their entire lives. Therefore, if human interactions with job and environment are disturbed for any reason, this causes stress and impaired physical, mental, and physiological frustration [11].

One of the very important and sensitive jobs in today and future societies is the job of teachers. Like any other job, it has its own particular sources of stress. One of these stress making factors is job burnout which as a global problem has been the subject of numerous studies in different countries. The present theoretical patterns suggest that there is an interactive relationship between stress and teachers’ job burnout. Some balancing variables have been reported in these patterns. One of these variables which seem to be related to job stress and also be an effective means to reduce job stress is emotional intelligence. Therefore, knowledge of emotional intelligence of teachers in their ways of understanding of and their skills in dealing with various job conflicts, as well as, its relationship with job stress are of paramount importance [2].

The current study was conducted to understand the relationship between job burnout and emotional intelligence amongst high school teachers in Dezful. It will demonstrate to the education system authorities and planners that how investment in training emotional intelligence skills, as trainable and improvable capacities, can reduce job stress and burnout.

Recent research has focused on job burnout as is one of the important working risks [1]. Job burnout is defined as a psychological disorder resulted from long term exposure to job related stress during one’s career life [10].

Job burnout is a cognitive syndrome which includes emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduction of personal performance. Emotional exhaustion is the feeling of being under pressure and is the destruction of one’s emotional resources. Depersonalization is the negative and callous response to individuals who are generally the receivers of one’s services, due to negative understanding of the service seekers. Reduction of
personal performance is the reduction in the feeling of being competent in doing personal duties and is a negative attitude of one’s self in doing the work [14].

Job burnout is a physical and mental syndrome accompanied with exhaustion that leads to negative attitude towards self, job, and receivers of one’s help or services, as well as to unproductive work, absenteeism, low morals, and lack of job satisfaction [15]. One of the factors affecting job burnout is stress, however, it is now believed that job burnout is not the result of stress only and emotional intelligence has a significant influence on one’s life and career success [18].

Emotional intelligence is a set of non-cognitive capabilities and skills that increases the individuals’ success in handling emotional pressures and social circumstances [2]. The proper application of emotions in relationships with others, understanding the circumstances of one’s self and that of others, self-controlling, and sympathy with others, as well as using positive emotions in thinking of and understanding the situations are the subject study of emotional intelligence [12].

According to Goldmans’ perspective, the emotional intelligence components are: self-awareness, self-control, social awareness and sympathy, social skills, and self-motivation. Self-awareness is the tendency to introspect and examine one’s inner self and feelings. It is the quality of clear and deep understanding of one’s feelings, emotions, weaknesses, strengths, needs, and interests. Self-control or self-management is the ability to control one’s emotions, behaviors, and desires in every situation and conducting one’s self appropriately in order to obtain some reward or avoid some punishment. Social awareness and sympathy is the feeling of care to other people’s concerns through understanding their spoken and unspoken messages and positively reacting to their distress and needs. It is the quality of having concern for the well-being and emotions of others. Social skills are a set of abilities that constitute the art of managing one’s relationships and interactions with others. Self-motivation is the ability to utilize emotions to achieve one’s goals, to reach favorable psychological states, and to not give up hope in the face of problems and difficulties. It is the ability to initiate, to undertake, or to continue a task or activity without prodding or supervision from someone else [9].

Since the advent of emotional intelligence in psychology literature, it has been investigated in various domains including job and working environments. Indeed, the researchers have tried to find the relationship between emotional intelligence and fundamental and effective factors that influence job success and eliminate job burnout.

Since the relationship between emotional intelligence and success in career has become evident, researchers have tried to conduct detailed research to investigate its relationship with different aspects related to job and its ability in improving productivity among workers and managers. For example, studies have shown that there is a direct relationship between emotional intelligence and job satisfaction and that emotional intelligence improves job performance through increasing sympathy and resistance against stress [3].

MATERIALS AND METHODS

As this research seeks to investigate the practical relationship between emotional intelligence and job burnout, descriptive statistics and correlation analysis methods were used. Total of 1,487 high school teachers were randomly selected for the initial data collection using the questionnaires. These teachers were employed for the 2012-2013 school year in Dezful city, south west of Iran.

The study sample consists of 200 teachers, 110 male and 90 female. SPSS software version 18 was used to conduct descriptive an inferential statistical analysis on the collected data. Descriptive statistics was used to organize, summarize, and classify the raw data and to describe the study sample dimensions and balance its frequency distribution table. Further, Pearson correlation coefficient and regression analysis were used to estimate and predict indices used for the purpose of this study.

The tools used in this study include three questionnaires: the first questionnaire was to collect demographic information of teachers including age, gender, marital status, work experience, and education level. The second questionnaire was the job burnout standard questionnaire (MBI) of Christian Maslach and Susan E. Jackson which includes 22 questions and measures the three components of job burnout syndrome: nine questions on emotional exhaustion, five questions on depersonalization, and 8 questions measure personal accomplishment. This questionnaire measures the level of job burnout of the sample group and questions are expressed in sentences about personal feelings. The questionnaire is in the form of Likert 5 scales and answers range from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

The third questionnaire is Shrinks’ emotional intelligence questionnaire which includes 33 questions in the form of Likert 5 scales and includes five sub scales including self-awareness, self-control, sympathy, social skills, and self motivation. By implementing this questionnaire, every subject receives six separate scores that five of them related to sub scales and one related to overall emotional intelligence. In the present study the validity of this questionnaire was confirmed via calculating Cronbach alpha (α=0.88) [13].
Results:

The analysis of descriptive statistics shows that the average age of teachers as the subjects of this study is 39 and their teaching experience is 17 years. The selected sample included 110 males and 90 females. 170 of these teachers had B.Sc. degree (BA), and 30 of the subjects were masters, M.Sc. degree (MA). In the present study 178 teachers were married and 22 were single.

Table 1: Mean, standard deviation, and correlation between emotional intelligence and its components with job burnout

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emotional intelligence</td>
<td>111.04</td>
<td>9.66</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-motivating</td>
<td>22.41</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td><strong>0.26</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-awareness</td>
<td>28.58</td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-controlling</td>
<td>22.64</td>
<td>4.40</td>
<td><strong>-0.73</strong></td>
<td><strong>-0.06</strong></td>
<td><strong>-0.32</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social awareness</td>
<td>20.77</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td><strong>-0.71</strong></td>
<td><strong>-0.05</strong></td>
<td><strong>-0.34</strong></td>
<td><strong>-0.51</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social skill</td>
<td>16.55</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td><strong>0.38</strong></td>
<td>-0.06</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burnout total score</td>
<td>66.24</td>
<td>7.13</td>
<td><strong>-0.31</strong></td>
<td><strong>-0.19</strong></td>
<td><strong>-0.18</strong></td>
<td><strong>-0.19</strong></td>
<td><strong>-0.22</strong></td>
<td>-0.10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional exhaustion</td>
<td>25.21</td>
<td>5.55</td>
<td><strong>-0.35</strong></td>
<td>-0.13</td>
<td><strong>-0.20</strong></td>
<td><strong>-0.21</strong></td>
<td><strong>-0.21</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alienation</td>
<td>9.80</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td><strong>-0.44</strong></td>
<td><strong>-0.26</strong></td>
<td><strong>-0.40</strong></td>
<td><strong>-0.23</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.33</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td><strong>0.42</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.32</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual performance</td>
<td>31.23</td>
<td>4.35</td>
<td><strong>0.28</strong></td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td><strong>0.27</strong></td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td><strong>0.15</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.21</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.25</strong></td>
<td><strong>-0.22</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.39</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As it is seen in table 1, the correlation between emotional intelligence and job burnout (r = -0.31) was significant at the level of 0.99. Also, the correlation between job burnout and self-motivation (r = -0.19), self-awareness (r = -0.18), self-controlling (r = -0.19) and social awareness (r = -0.22) were significant at level of 0.99. The correlation between social skills and job burnout was not significant. The correlation between emotional intelligence and emotional exhaustion (r = -0.35), alienation (r = -0.44) and individual performance (r = 0.28) were significant at level of 0.99. As it is shown in table 1, job burnout correlates with all independent variables at significance level of 0.99, except with social skills variable.

In the next step, the job burnout was considered as dependent variable and emotional intelligence and all its components, self-motivating, self-awareness, self-controlling, social awareness and social skills, were considered as independent variable in the regression model. The regression model showed that 68% of the observed scatter in burnout variable is determined by independent variable and R² = 0.097.

ANOVA table examines two hypotheses: (1) that there is no linear relationship between independent variables and dependent variable in the population and (2) all regression coefficients in the population are zero. The examination of these hypotheses is done on the basis of the proportion between square of regression mean and square of remainder mean. This proportion is shown with F which is seen in table 2 below.

Table 2: Analysis of variance (ANOVA) for job burnout (F test: Total Regression)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Sum of radicals</th>
<th>Degree of freedom</th>
<th>Mean of radicals</th>
<th>F proportion</th>
<th>Significant level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regression</td>
<td>980.591</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>980.591</td>
<td>21.243</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remainder</td>
<td>9139.889</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>46.161</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>10120.480</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>1026.752</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the significant level is less than 0.001, the first hypothesis is rejected: at least one of the regression coefficients is not zero. The regression coefficients of single independent variables show that the emotional intelligence or its components independently are able to predict the scatter of burnout variable at the significant level of 0.001.

Table 3: Regression index analysis for emotional intelligence as a predictor of job burnout

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variable</th>
<th>Impact coefficient (β)</th>
<th>T-test</th>
<th>Significant level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Intelligence</td>
<td>0.311</td>
<td>-4.609</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The impact coefficient in Table 3 shows that if the emotional intelligence changes one unit, job burnout variable will change 0.311 in the opposite direction.

The results of T-test of independent variable show that the scores of studied variables in groups having different gender or marital status were not significantly different in the study groups. Further, the results of variance analysis showed that the scores of emotional intelligence of teachers having different ages were not significantly different.
Discussion:

There is a long history of attempts to improve the emotional intelligence and social and emotional capabilities of employees. Recently, the employers have realized the vital role of emotional intelligence in work performance. Findings of various studies show that there is a reverse relationship between emotional intelligence and job burnout. Further, the emotional intelligence components can predict job burnout contributors.

According to Goldman, sympathy or social awareness reduces job burnout: sympathetic people are more familiar with subtle social cues and interactions that are indicators of the desires and needs of other people. These abilities empower sympathetic people in their professional, managerial and educational endeavours via helping them to better communicate and interact with other people. Further, these abilities also enable them to access social support resources more easily which in turn play a crucial role in protecting them against problems and mental distress. This understanding is consistent with Ciarrochi et al who concluded that people supported by social resources can adapt to stress and protect themselves against consequential difficulties better than those who did not receive such social supports.

Goldman [9] recognizes self-awareness as the main component of emotional intelligence. Those with this trait are more skillful in controlling and leading life events and coping with feelings and emotional storms compared to others. Ciarrochi et al. [6] showed that self-awareness has reverse relationship with despair and depression. People with self-awareness are more optimistic and more hopeful towards life and hence are more resistant against stress which is one of the main contributing factors to job burnout.

The third component of emotional intelligence is social skills, that is, controlling emotions in a proper way, after self-awareness has been achieved. This component is of utmost importance in establishing and maintaining effective relationships with others. It is also a core component of leadership as it plays a major role in establishing harmonious interpersonal relationships.

Self-motivation means concentrating emotions to achieve goals, power, confidence, attention, and creativity. Self-motivating people can postpone satisfaction of their urgent desires and always are active and try hard to achieve their goals (the opposite point of job burnout).

Finally, self-controlling is the ability to avoid negative emotions such as anxiety, frustration, disappointment, and excitation. This trait helps people to better cope with the ups and downs of life and to retreat from irritating situations to pleasant ones very fast. This capability is rare in people with job burnout.

Moreover, the results of Pearson correlation showed that there is a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and emotional exhaustion (r=0.134, p=0.06). The relationship between these two components is a negative diverse, i.e. the more emotional intelligence increases, the more emotional exhaustion of job burnout decreases and vice versa. These findings are consistent with the findings of Budnik [4] who pointed out that job burnout component is important in predicting emotional intelligence of nurses.

The results of this study showed that there is a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and individual performance of teachers (r=0.441 and p=0.001). This finding is not consistent with findings of Froese [8] who studied 57 health practitioners and concluded that emotional intelligence is not a predicting factor of individual performance.

Further, this study showed that there is no significant correlation between emotional intelligence and depersonalization which is not consistent with Farmer [7] and Zaph’s [19] findings, but consistent with Froese’s findings (Froese, 2009) (r=0.150 and p=0.124). Of course, the relationship between these two components is direct and positive, that is, if emotional intelligence increases, individual performance component of job burnout increases too.

The findings of this research are consistent with Zaph [19] who in his study showed that emotional intelligence traits have relationship with all three sub components of job burnout (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduction of personal performance) and that employees who are more emotionally intelligent are more immune to job burnout. However, Schutte [17] who studied the relationship between emotional intelligence and job conflict and health, concluded that none of the emotional intelligence components have relationship with job conflict, emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduction of personal performance; hence, none of the emotional intelligence traits alone is enough to reduce conflict and emotional abnormalities. The findings of Schutte [17] are not consistent with the findings of this study.

Carson [5] studied the relationship between emotional intelligence and creative personality, self-control component, and emotional exhaustion. They concluded that there is a significant and negative correlation between emotional intelligence and emotional exhaustion which is consistent with the findings of this study.

Conclusion:

The most important outcomes of this study are awareness of negative relationship between job burnout and emotional intelligence (and its components) and the practicality of promoting emotional intelligence of teachers to reduce their job burnout. Hence, managers of the educational system may plan practical programs for reducing teachers’ job burnout through awareness of these influencing factors.
As two components of job burnout—namely emotional exhaustion and reduction of personal performance—significantly correlate with emotional intelligence, and as emotional intelligence is a learnable trait, it is suggested that teaching emotional intelligence should be included in the curriculum of teachers’ development workshops. These workshops are intended to provide teachers with the necessary techniques to enhance their ability to control self and the educational atmosphere, to improve their self-esteem, and to enhance their coping skills. Particularly, the training of teachers should focus on improving their abilities to recognize their own feelings and emotions and that of students, to properly express feelings and emotions to others, and to control emotions. It is expected that these programs should not only reduce the job burnout of teachers but also enhance the quality of their training services to their students. Moreover, emotional intelligence of teachers can be used as a criterion to evaluate their competency for recruitment and promotional purposes.

REFERENCES