

## Effect of Emotional Intimacy on Professional Burnout: A study among Special Educators of Mentally Challenged Children in Kerala

**Reesha karally**

Senior Research Fellow  
Department of Education  
University of Calicut, Kerala  
reeshakh@gmail.com

**Dr. P. Usha**

Associate Professor  
Department of Education  
University of Calicut, Kerala  
ushapmohan@yahoo.com

---

**Abstract:** The present study is an attempt to estimate the effect of emotional intimacy on professional burnout among special educators of mentally challenged children. Significant difference in emotional intimacy and professional burnout are seen when special educators are classified based on their Length of Service. The study revealed that emotional intimacy significantly influence professional burnout of special educators and emotional intimacy toward children is decreasing across time; whereas professional burnout goes on increasing by increase in the length of service of special educators. The study concluded that enhancing emotional intimacy towards children will help the special educators to reduce professional burnout. High emotional intimacy with mentally challenged children will reduce stress among special educators and thereby burnout can be prevented.

**Key words:** Emotional Intimacy, Professional Burnout, Special Educators, Mentally challenged, Length of Service

---

### I. Introduction

Education is an integral part of the total social pattern. It takes place in the interaction of individual, groups and entire culture. Education through its various processes of instructions tries to modify the society and the behavior of the individual. Special education is instruction designed for students with special needs. They are the group whose patterns of educational needs are very different from their peer group. Special education services are provided only to those children who possess deviations from normality and require special teaching competence or unusual school services. Among different categories of children with special needs, mentally challenged are quite different. As they are deviated from normal intelligence, they need special care and training to meet various needs.

Mental retardation is a disability characterized by significant limitations both in intellectual functioning and in adaptive behavior as expressed in conceptual, social and practical adaptive skills (American Association for Mental Retardation- AAMR, 1996). The thinking and perception level of mentally challenged are slow when compared to those of the normal children (Sternberg & Grigorenko, 2002) [19]. Even then they have the capacity to learn, to develop and to grow. Appropriate educational services that begin in infancy and continue throughout the developmental period and beyond will enable them to develop to their fullest potential. Special educator is the person who is responsible for giving training to mentally challenged children in schools. The transaction of any task may be effective only if there is an intimate emotional bond between the educator and the challenged child. Emotional Intimacy is the liking, friendship, trust and feeling of emotional closeness between two persons. It is an aspect of interrelationship that varies in intensity from one relationship to another. It may refer to any context including professional. The degree of comfort, effectiveness and mutual experience of emotional closeness might indicate emotional intimacy between individuals. It is a Psychological event that occurs when the trust level and connection between two people is high. In order to bring out child's talents, skills and potentials, the teacher should possess Emotional Intimacy with the challenged child.

Comparing to normal children, teaching/training mentally challenged children is stressful. The special educators have to play different roles. As care taker, trainer, parent, his/her days become hectic and demanding. There by the days become more and more stressful. Besides these, many other factors like, working environment, interaction with parents, colleagues and challenged children, attitude of authorities and parents, salary, opportunities

for promotion and professional growth will eventually contribute to their stress. Exposure to extreme stress in schools might lead to burnout. Burnout is considered to be a long-term stress reaction that particularly occurs among professionals who work with people in some capacity—like teachers, nurses, social workers, or COs (Maslach & Schaufeli, 1993) [14]. Commonly it is described as a psychological syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach, 1998) [14]. Emotional exhaustion refers to feelings of being emotionally overextended and depleted of one's emotional resources. Depersonalization refers to a negative, callous, or excessively detached response to other people who are usually the recipients of one's services or care. Reduced personal accomplishment refers to a decline in one's feelings of competence and successful achievement in one's work. The first stage is characterized by an imbalance between resources and demands (stress). In human services professions, considerable stress is caused by the emotionally demanding relationships with recipients (e.g., pupils, patients, clients, or prisoners) that eventually may result in the depletion of one's emotional resources. Next, a set of negative attitudes and behaviors is developed, such as a tendency to treat recipients in a detached and mechanical manner or a cynical preoccupation with gratification of one's own needs. Essentially, these negative attitudes and behaviors that constitute the depersonalization component of burnout are to be considered as defensive coping mechanisms.

Levince (1991) conducted a study on how intimacy develops between speakers and a listener and result revealed that intimacy quickly create a bond and if repeated, enhances psychological function. Study supports psychological intimacy is the glue of all important relationships, including professional. Bauminger et al. (2008) examined attachment, coherence and self-disclosure as predictors of intimacy in adolescent friendships and found that attachment, coherence and disclosure strongly predicts intimacy and avoidant and anxious attachment had an indirect effect on intimacy. Coll et al., (2010) studied the relation between family cohesion and adaptability and the formation of trust and intimacy among adolescents in residential treatment and the result revealed that family cohesion predicts trust and that trust is significantly influential in the formation of intimacy. Stefansen et al., (2011) explores how a particular type of intimacy- an enriching intimacy is produced as part of everyday parent-child interaction and result revealed that parent's intimacy influence the child's achievement in schools. McAllister et al., (2012) investigate the influence of couple emotional intimacy on job perceptions (job concerns and job rewards) and work- family conflict. The result revealed that couple emotional intimacy predicted fewer job concerns, more job rewards, less work to family conflict and less family to work conflict.

Research finding on burnout (Maslach & Pines, 1978; Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Farber 1984) revealed that burnout impedes job performance. Burnout represents the index of the dislocation between what people are and what they have to. Friedman (1995) examined how typical student behavior patterns contribute to predicting burnout among teachers. Result revealed that 22% teacher burnout is due to typical student behaviors- disrespect, inattentiveness and sociability. Greenglass et al., (1997) examined the antecedents and consequences of burnout including the role of work stressors and social support from supervisors and co-workers among teachers. The result revealed greater co-worker support contributed to the prediction of burnout, particularly to decreased depersonalization and increased feelings of accomplishment. Zapf et al (2001) analyzed the relations of emotion work variables with organizational and social variables and their joint effect on burnout. Result reveals a unique contribution of emotion work variables in the prediction of burnout. Decker et al (2002) investigate burnout among child care workers at licensed residential treatment centres. Purpose of the study was to investigate the extent of burnout among child care workers and the relationship of selected demographic and situational variables to this burnout. Findings indicated significant correlation between lower burnout scores and factors such as institutional support, supervision, education and age. Haken sari (2004) explores issues of burnout and job satisfaction among special school head teachers and teachers in Turkey to find out whether significant difference between head teachers and teachers burnout and job satisfaction in terms of work status, gender and work experience and to analyze the factors affecting job satisfaction. Results indicated that special school head teachers felt less personal accomplishment than special school teachers. In terms of gender, males have less emotional exhaustion and personal accomplishment but higher depersonalization than females. In relation to experience, more experienced subjects have higher emotional exhaustion and deeper than their less experienced colleagues and also less job satisfaction than less experienced. Maria et al (2008) studied the perceived levels of burnout, job satisfaction, job related stress factors among Greek special educators. Result indicated that Greek special education teachers reported average and low levels of burnout and moderately to high levels of job satisfaction, average satisfaction with job condition and low satisfaction with prospects of promotion and pay. Lavian (2012) studied the impact of organizational climate on

burnout among home room teachers and special education teachers working in Israeli state schools. Study revealed that feelings of stress and burnout were found common to teachers in both regular and special education classes, but it is more among special school teachers and school organizational climate was found to have a significant impact on burnout.

The review of studies suggests that regarding emotional intimacy no study has been conducted upon teachers or special educators to explore their extent of emotional intimacy towards their children. Regarding professional burnout very rarely studies has been conducted on special educators. Thus the study was conducted to know the professional burnout of special educators of mentally challenged children in Kerala in relation to their emotional intimacy and length of service. It is possible that result of the study will enable the teacher educators to take necessary steps to enhance emotional intimacy towards their children there by professional burnout can be reduced or prevented. For this following objectives were formulated

## II. Objectives

1. To find out whether significant difference exists in emotional intimacy and professional burn out when special educators are classified based on their length of service.
2. To find out the main effect of independent variables (emotional intimacy and length of service) on dependent variable (professional burnout)
3. To find out the interaction effects of emotional intimacy and length of service on professional burnout.

## III. Hypotheses

Following hypotheses were framed to analyze the objectives:

1. There is significant difference in the emotional intimacy among special educators when they are classified based on their length of service.
2. There is significant difference in the professional burnout among special educators when they are classified based on their length of service.
3. The main effect of emotional intimacy on professional burnout of special educators is significant.
4. The main effect of length of service on professional burnout of special educators is significant
5. The interaction effect of emotional intimacy and length of service on professional burnout of special educators is significant

## IV. Method

### *Sample*

The sample consisted of 100 special educators selected randomly from different special schools of seven districts across Kerala. Out of this 48 special educators have up to 5 years of teaching experience and 52 have above 5 years of teaching experience.

### *Tool*

Two tools were used for data collection. Scale of Emotional Intimacy, which is a five-point rating scale (always, often, sometimes, seldom, never) developed and standardized by the investigators. The tool consists of 42 items both positive and negative items belonging to 7 different aspects of an individual's emotional intimacy such as Deep connection, Open heartedness, Devotion, Responsibility for self, Faith in one's own and others goodness, Love and Compassion and Commitment. The test retest reliability of the scale is found to be 0.83. Content validity is ensured. The second tool is Scale of Professional Burnout, which is a five point scale (always, often, sometimes, seldom, never) developed and standardized by the investigators. It consists of 36 items including both positive and negative statements belonging to 3 components of professional burnout viz., Emotional Exhaustion,

Depersonalization and Reduced Personal Accomplishment. The test retest reliability is found to be 0.79 and has been validated against external criterion.

**Statistical Technique**

Mean difference analysis was done to find out whether significant difference exist in emotional intimacy and professional burnout among special educators when classified based on their length of service. Twoway ANOVA was done to study the effect of emotional intimacy on professional burnout of special educators. For this special educator was classified in to three groups based on their level of emotional intimacy (low, average and high) by using classificatory technique, taking mean and standard deviation as the determinants ( $\text{mean} \pm 1\sigma$ ). Mean difference analysis for different groups (low and average, average and high and high and low) based on emotional intimacy was also done.

**V. Results and Discussion**

The data was analyzed to find answers to the hypotheses set for the study. The results obtained for mean difference analysis and one way ANOVA have been presented in table 1 & 2 respectively.

**Table 1. Data and result of t-test of emotional intimacy and professional burnout when classified based on Length of Service of special educators**

Variable	Length of service up to 5 years			Length of service above 5 years			t-value	Level of significance
	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N		
Emotional Intimacy	197.2	12.15	47	183	17.78	53	4.6	Significant at 0.01 level
Professional Burnout	53.01	7	47	80.3	11	53	6.6	Significant at 0.01 level

From the t-test it is found that there exists significant difference in the emotional intimacy between two groups based on the length of service. As the length of service increases, emotional intimacy towards their children was seen decreased. It means that across time the extent of devotion, love, compassion, faith, responsibility for self, commitment, deep connection and openheartedness (components of emotional intimacy) of special educators towards their children goes on decreasing.

There exists a significant difference in professional burnout among special educators based on their length of service. As the length of services increases professional burnout also increases. From available literature also it is clear that burnout is a process that gradually develops across time (Maslach & Leiter, 1997 [10]; Schaufeli & Enzmann, 1998) [16].

**Table 2. Summary of the result of two-way ANOVA**

Sources of variation	df	SS	MM	F	Level of significance
Emotional intimacy	2	10745.80	5372.90	70.65	Significant at 0.01
Length of service	1	7891.03	7891.03	103.76	Significant at 0.01
Emotional intimacy* length of service	2	398.69	199.34	2.62	Not significant
Total	100	477476			

**Main effect (Emotional intimacy/ Length of service)**

ANOVA results presented in table 2 shows the F- value for Emotional intimacy on Professional burnout is 70.65 and that for Length of service of special educators on professional burnout is 103.76. Both values are significant at 0.01

levels. It indicates that the main effect of emotional intimacy on professional burnout and length of service on professional burnout is significant. As the main effect is found to be significant, t-test was done to find out the significant difference between mean scores of each group (low and average, average and high, high and low). The result is given in table 3.

**Table 3 summary of test of significance of difference between low, average and high groups of emotional intimacy**

Emotional Intimacy	M	SD	N	t-value	Level of significance
Low Average	85.1 66.08	16.6 13.08	19 61	5.17	Significant at 0.01 level
Low High	85.1 53.1	16.6 9.79	19 20	7.35	Significant at 0.01 level
Average High	66.08 53.1	13.08 9.79	61 20	4.7	Significant at 0.01 level

From table 3, it is evident that the difference in the mean scores of emotional intimacy among groups (difference between low and average group, average and high group and low and high group) is found to be significant at 0.01 level of significance.

#### **Interaction effect (Emotional intimacy × Length of service)**

The F value for the interaction effect of emotional intimacy and Length of service on Professional burnout is 2.62 which is not significant. Therefore, there exist no significant interaction effect of emotional intimacy and length of service on professional burnout of special educators of mentally challenged children in Kerala.

### **VI. Conclusion**

After analyzing the data following conclusions have been drawn

1. Length of service affect emotional intimacy and professional burn out of special educators of mentally challenged children in Kerala
2. As the length of service increases, emotional intimacy decreases, whereas professional burnout increases with increase in the length of service of special educators
3. Emotional intimacy influences professional burnout of special educators
4. Length of service influences professional burnout of special educators
5. There difference in emotional intimacy among three groups (low, average and high) is significant
6. There is no interaction effect of emotional intimacy and length of service on professional burnout of special educators

### **VII. Educational Implications**

We are living in the era of education for all. We are demanding for equality of educational opportunities and free and compulsory education. Still there are marginalized groups like children with special needs. Among them mentally challenged children is the most neglected group. In Kerala special education in general and special schools for mentally challenged in particular are the unloved area by the society. There are many special schools for mentally challenged children in the state. Surprisingly there are no schools under government sector. The schools are run either by charitable trusts or by religious or social groups. There are well trained and qualified teachers in every school. Among them majority are exposed to high stress and professional burnout. In the present study it is evident that the influence of emotional intimacy on professional burnout is highly significant. It is found that the level of professional burnout is low for those having high emotional intimacy towards children. Therefore measures

should be taken to foster emotional intimacy among special educators; there by burnout can be prevented or reduced. The working atmosphere should be improved. Special educators must be provided with good pay, sufficient teaching learning materials, provisions to improve professionalism, opportunities for job promotion and job recognition. The attitude of parents, school authorities and the society towards special educators should be improved. In the society they are receiving less recognition compared to the common school teachers. Government should take initiative to start schools under public sector, there by job security and basic pay can be ensured.

### VIII. References

1. Bauminger., Ricky Finzy-Dottan., Sagit Chason. &Dovhar-Even. (2008). Intimacy in adolescent friendship: The role of attachment, coherence and self- disclosure. *Journal of social and personal relationships*, vol. 25 (3). 409-428
2. Dieter Zapf., Claudia Seifert., Barbara Schumutte., HeidrunMortini. & Melanie Holz. (2001). Emotion work and job stressors and their effects on burnout. *Psychology & Health*, Vol. 16 (5)
3. Esther R. Greenglass., Ronald J. Bruke. & Roman Konarski. (1997). The impact of social support on the development of burnout in teachers: examination of a model. *Work Stress: An International Journal of Work, Health & Organization*, Vol.11 (3)
4. Farber, B. A. (1984). Stress and burnout in suburban teachers. *Journal of Educational Research*. Vol. 77, 325-337
5. Haken Sari. (2004). An analysis of burnout and job satisfaction among Turkish special school head teachers and teachers and the factors affecting their burnout and job satisfaction. *Educational Studies*, Vol. 30(3)
6. Isaac. A. Friedman. (1995). Student behavior pattern contributing teacher burnout. *The journal of educational research*, Vol. 85 (5)
7. James D. Decker., Tammy Lynn Bailey. & Nikki Westergaard. (2002). Burnout among child workers. *Residential treatment for children and youth*, Vol. 19 (4)
8. Kari Stefensen. & Helen Aarseth. (2011): Enriching intimacy: The role of the emotional in the resourcing of middle-class children. *British journal of sociology of education*, Vol. 32(2). 389-405.
9. Kenneth M. Coll., Stephanie Powell., Patti Thohro. & Robin Hass. (2010). Family functioning and development of trust and intimacy among adolescents in residential treatment. *The family journal*, Vol. 18 (3). 255-262
10. Maclach, C. &Leiter, M. (1997). *The truth about Burnout: How Organizations cause Personal stress and what to do about it*. San Fransisco, CA: Jossey- Bass
11. Maria plastsidou. &IonnisAgaliotis. (2008). Burnout, job satisfaction and instructional assignment related sources of stress in Greek special education teachers. *International journal of disability, development and education*, Vol. 55 (1)
12. Maslach, C.& Pines, A. (1978). Characteristics of staff burnout in mental health settings. *Hospital and Community Psychiatry*, Vol. 29, 223-237
13. Maslach, C. & Jackson S.E. (1981). The measurement of experienced burnout. *Journal of Occupational Behaviour*, Vol. 2(2), 99-113
14. Maslach, C. &Schaufeli, W.B. (1993): Historical and conceptual development of burnout. In Maslach, C. (1998). *A multidimensional theory of burnout*. In C.L. Cooper (Ed.), *Theories of organizational stress*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
15. Rivka Hillel Lavian. (2012). The impact of organizational climate on burnout among homeroom teachers and special education teachers. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, Vol. 18 (2)
16. Schaufeli, W.B. &Enzmann, D. (1998). *The burnout companion to study and research: A critical analysis*. London: Taylor & Francis.
17. SheleceMcAliister., Carly. M. Thornock., Jeffrey R. Hammond., Erin K. Holmes. & E. Jeffrey Hill. (2012). The influence of couple emotional intimacy on job perceptions and work-family conflict. *Family and Consumer Sciences*, Vol. 40 (4). 330-347
18. Stephen B. Levine. (1991). Psychological Intimacy. *Journal of sex and marital therapy*, Vol. 17 (4). 259-267
19. Sternberg, R. J. &Grigorenko, E. L. (2002): The theory of intelligence as a basis for gifted education. *Gifted child Quarterly* 46, pp. 265-277