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Article: Exploring the Abyss: A Study on Secondary Schools Students' Burnout in Rawalpindi

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EXPLORING THE ABYSS: A STUDY ON SECONDARY SCHOOLS STUDENTS' BURNOUT IN RAWALPINDI

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to assess the levels of burnout among secondary school students, focusing on emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and academic efficacy sub constructs of burnout. The design of the study was descriptive and survey method was used to collect the data. Data were collected through a seven points Likert scale questionnaire. The study found that students of 9th grade reported a consistent level of burnout, with slightly higher burnout in academic efficacy than emotional exhaustion. Cynicism had the lowest mean score, indicating lower disinterest in studies. These findings suggest that early intervention and support for secondary school students may be necessary to mitigate potential burnout and its effects on academic performance and well-being.

Keywords: Burnout, 9th Grade, Secondary School Students, Emotional Exhaustion, Cynicism, and Academic Efficacy.

Introduction

A school provides a pathway for students to achieve the advanced level of excellence. The success of the students depends not only on students' academic skills but also their psychological, emotional, mental health and wellbeing. A peaceful learning environment helps to maximize the potential of students in classroom, but a stressful learning environment leads to educational or academic problems and adds to student apprehension and anxiety, and thus, burnout. Burnout was first described by Freudenberger (1974), and he symbolizes it with a severe stress with a feeling of exhausted, restless and unable to cope with the current situation. He described the situation of becoming a burned-out person as feeling exhausted while making extraordinary demands of energy required for physical and mental activity.⁸ It can be expressed as feeling overtired due to study pressure, having distrustful and isolated attitude, and feeling inferior as a student.¹

In schools, it means that the students face academic pressure with no time to relax. They are facing ongoing stress and frustration in terms of academics i.e. assignments, science projects, formative assessments, and final board exams. It ultimately affects overall student's grades

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and academics. Unfortunately, many teachers, parents, and students themselves are unaware about the term 'burnout'. Teachers and parents demand good academic scores from the children which require a long to do list with lot of stress and pressure. This stressful environment makes the students incapable of fulfilling their academic functioning appropriately, in result of adding stress and pressure, they ultimately face burnout. Students with weak academic skills experience more stress and pressure in their schools. There may exist a dangerous cycle as many students start studying for long hours to improve their performances. This ultimately makes the students unable to complete their academic tasks and might be at risk of burning out.

The problem comes when the work and the stress are non-stop. When education becomes a burden for the students instead of enlightenment then it becomes a serious concern. Majority students when do not easily cope with their examination pressure, either they fail the exam or leave the institutions.² Public schools in Pakistan often involve the children in rote memorization and reproducing the prescribed textbook knowledge through assessments.² The academic achievement of students is normally measured by continuous assessments or examination system which cannot measure the stress or burnout, the student already facing. When the students switch from primary to higher classes, students also face a time of transition regarding physical, emotional, psychological, and social changes which depends on mental health of students. This mental health leads to physical health and happiness for a student which is necessary to accomplish an academic goal.

Burnout among students have been an important topic of research during the last decades. Many researchers have done exclusive work on burnout among secondary school students globally but unfortunately, students' burnout in high schools is not properly addressed in Pakistan. Previous research studies have covered the causes and reasons of students' burnout. Researchers agree that in last few decades, burnout disorder has obtained attention day by day and become an important issue which needs to be understand and discussed that is why this phenomenon had been studied in many studies.^{3/4}

They proved that the burned-out students often leave their schools and do not rejoin and overall, they have lower commitment for their tasks as well.⁵ They indicated that these students do not participate in class much, remain absent from the school or classrooms and do not have much interest with classroom lectures and activities.⁶

The students who continue their studies, feel frustrated, un-interested and academically less determined to achieve their academic goals.⁷ There is a dire need to know whether the students' burnout really exist in high schools and if students are facing burnout, then whether it prevails in high school caused by failure in course subjects, excessive school or home tasks or due to exam pressure. There was numerous research studies conducted on burnout with teachers and colleges, medical or dental students but students' burnout in secondary schools was not investigated before.⁸ It was important to know about their

burnout so that recommendations can be put forward to prevent the students from academic burnout.⁹

Theoretical Framework

The concept of burnout in the early times was addressed to workplace related professions and professionals only. It was later adapted by educational psychologists.¹ The most commonly used instrument to measure students' burnout is Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI). While using this inventory, students' burnout is considered as a phenomenon or state where the students cannot meet their educational expectations by themselves. In result of this burnout, students may have depression, absenteeism, and dropping out of school.

MBI has three core components.

Emotional Exhaustion: It can be described as a feeling of tiredness with excessive amount of burden and overload. It can be the feelings of strain and fatigue resulted into reduced energy of one's emotional, physical and mental energy. Emotionally exhausted people often feel empty or consumed. They suffer lack of motivation when exhausted.

Cynicism: It is described as negative, rigid and un-emotional attitude of a person. It can be a hostile feeling for ones' own thoughts and an indifferent attitude towards study or work as they feel lack of self-interest to the specific task. People have pessimistic approach towards life and their ambitions in life. They feel distrustful and negative even about themselves more than anything.

Academic Efficacy: It refers to the personal accomplishment relates to personal evaluation of oneself. A person feels himself as a successful, sufficient, and powerful when dealing with problems. It also empowers the ability of oneself to produce desirable results with feelings of competence and successful achievement and accomplishment in one's work. To complete tasks efficiently, people feel sense of adequacy.

Measurements of Burnout

Different tools were developed to measure burnout. The detail is as follows:

MBI-Human Services Survey for Medical Personnel MBI-HSS (MP): It is a form of the Human Services Survey designed for medical practitioners which includes:

- Feelings of being emotionally disturbed.
- Lack of interest to complete things or to meet people.
- Feelings of lack of competency in one's work.
- Feeling to remain isolated.
- Feeling low due to emotional disturbance.

MBI-Educators Survey MBI-ES: It is a version used for educationists including teachers, administrators, other staff members, and volunteers who are working in any educational setting. This version of MBI helps and provides guidance to the person related to the educational field.

MBI-General Survey MBI-GS: It has been developed for non-human services and education occupational classes such as customer care services and their maintenance and management.

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MBI-General Survey for Students MBI-GS(S): The Burnout Inventory- General Student Survey (MBI-GS) (S) was developed to measure burnout for the students who read in college or university. It was cited as the most used research tool for measuring burnout in various student populations around the globe.¹¹ This inventory is a modified form of the General Students (MBI-GS) Maslach Burnout Inventory. MBI-SS has three dimensions.

- Emotional Exhaustion (EME)
- Cynicism (CY)
- Academic Efficacy (AE)

Researchers found that the MBI-SS scale, designed to measure student burnout rates, includes 15 items evaluating the dimensions of emotional exhaustion (5-items), cynicism (4-items), and academic effectiveness (6-items). Students were being scored on 7-point Likert Scale from 1 (Never) to 7 (Always) specify their agreement on each item. Burnout indices are high scores on the measures of EME, CY, and poor understanding of AE.¹⁰

The research questions were as follows:

- What is the degree of burnout among students at secondary level?
- What is the extent of emotional exhaustion among students at secondary level?
- What is the degree of cynicism among students at secondary level?
- What is the magnitude of academic efficacy among students at secondary level?

Research Methodology

This was a quantitative study. The design of the study was descriptive research design and method used in it was survey to collect the data. An adapted questionnaire was used to collect the data on students' burnout. It was developed by Maslach Burnout. MBI-SS questionnaire has three sub-constructs: EME, CY, and AE. Twelve high schools were selected as a sample from tehsil Rawalpindi of Punjab province. Population of the study was 10316 9th grade students from which students' burnout questionnaire was distributed among these randomly selected 840 students whereas, only 695 questionnaires were returned, and the response rate was 83%. As suggested by researchers it is appropriate.¹¹

To meet the objective of the research, Maslach Burnout Inventory-Student Survey (MBI-SS) a standardized questionnaire was adapted for collecting the data. It has 15 items including three subscales; EME (5 items), CY (4 items) and AE (6 items) were used. High scores on emotional exhaustion and cynicism and low scores on academic efficacy are indicators of burnout. Each item was measured on 7-point Likert Scale ranging from 0 (Never) to 6 (Every day). All changes of language of instruments were made with the help of three bi-lingual experts. The instrument originally was found in English language which was little bit difficult to understand for secondary level students. The Inventory was translated into Urdu language so the students can easily understand its true meanings. The understanding was quite difficult even when translated into Urdu language. All three experts suggested using more easy words in Urdu questionnaire so that the students can completely understand the true sense of questions at first glance. Thus, the subject- experts translated this instrument into simpler

Urdu language so that the students of 9th grade can understand it more easily. The three experts translated it one by one, and validated it.

Pilot Study

A pilot study was initially done to check the reliability of the research tool. For this purpose, the questionnaires were distributed among 50 students from two different schools. The scoring of the respondents was recorded based on their responses. The researcher investigated internal consistency Alpha of MBI-SS reported reliability values of these three subscales as emotional exhaustion (0.73), cynicism (0.71), and academic efficacy (0.76) whereas, overall value of Cronbach alpha was found as 0.695 which was acceptable for the research tool.

The researchers collected the data by themselves with personal visits. It was also collected with the help of colleagues and friends. They guided the respondents carefully to record each item while collecting it. It was tabulated, organized, and analyzed after the data were obtained. The data were analyzed statistically by using SPSS software. The total respondents were 695. The response rate was 83%. The data were analyzed by calculating descriptive statistics.

Table 1

Normality of Data with P-P Plot

Burnout Categories	Shapiro-Wilk test statistics	p-value
Emotional Exhaustion	0.981	0.001
Cynicism	0.986	0.001
Academic Efficacy	0.985	0.001
Total Burnout	0.994	0.012

The data were tested for normality to determine whether it follow the assumptions of the test statistic. The table 1 provided the values of Shapiro-Wilk test for all the levels of burnout i.e. emotional exhaustion (EME), cynicism (CY), academic efficacy (AE), total burnout associated probabilities (p-values). The p-value for all burnout levels was less than 0.05. It was concluded that all the burnout levels of data followed the normal distribution.

In the normal P-P Plot, all burnout sub-scales (EME, CY and AE) data points were very close to the diagonal line which depicted that the data were normally distributed. Total burnout and academic achievement percentages were along the line in P-P plot, so the data were considered as normal.

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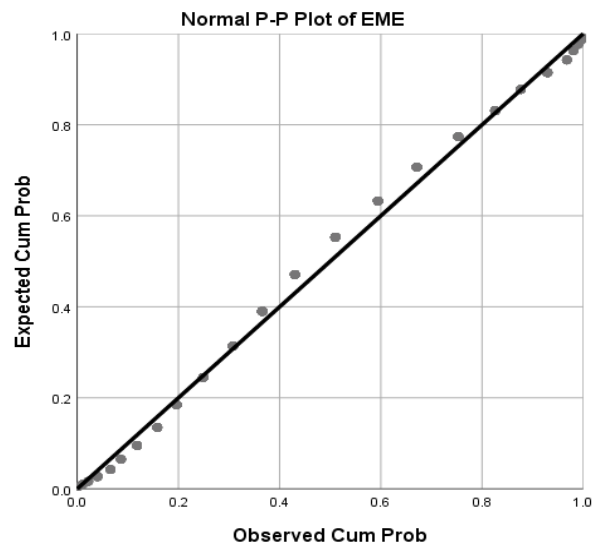


Figure 1: P-P plot of Emotional Exhaustion (EME)

Figure 1 showed that data collection of (EME) through Shapiro-Wilk test statistics was along the straight line, therefore, the data was normally distributed.

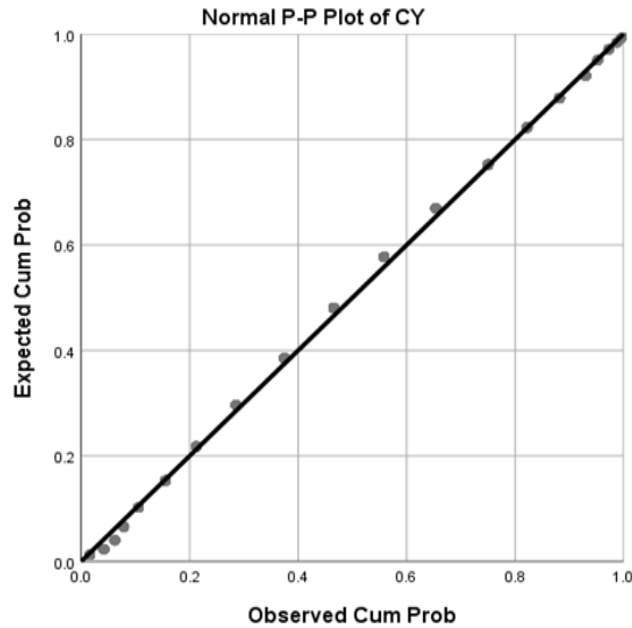


Figure 2: P-P plot of Cynicism (CY)

Figure 2 showed that data collection of (CY) through Shapiro-Wilk test statistics was along the straight line, therefore, the data was normally distributed.

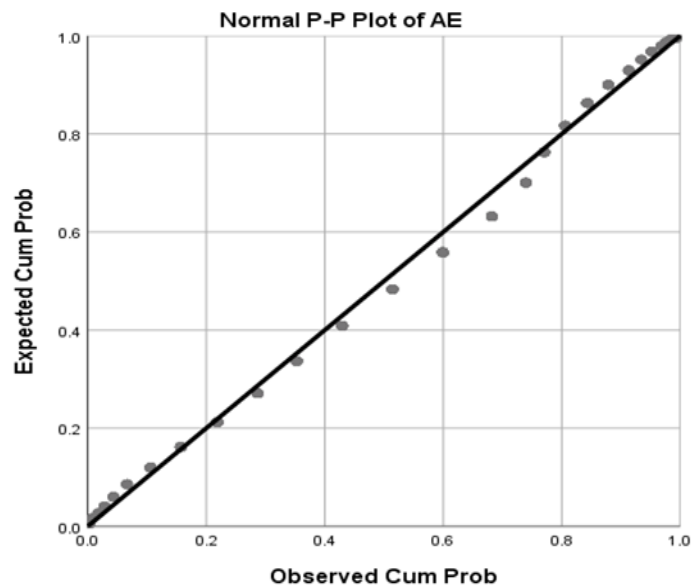


Figure 3: P-P plot of Academic Efficacy (AE)

Figure 3 showed that data collection of (AE) through Shapiro-Wilk test statistics was along the straight line, therefore the data was normally distributed.

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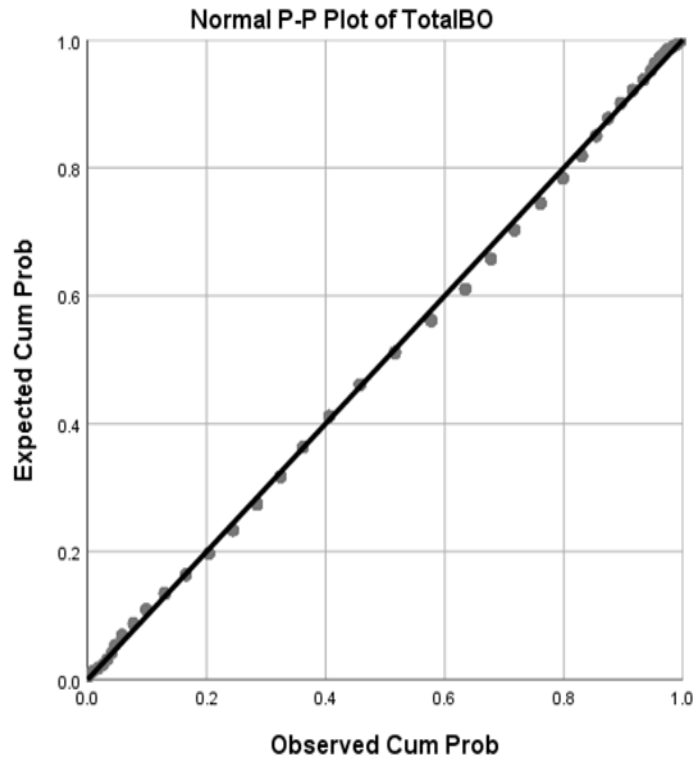


Figure 4: P-P plot of total Burnout

Figure 4 showed that data collection of total burnout through Shapiro-Wilk test statistics was along the straight line, therefore, the data was normally distributed.

Results

Table 2

Degree of burnout on sub-scales among 9th grade students

Subscales of Burnout	n	Mean	Standard Deviation
Emotional Exhaustion	695	3.27	0.42
Cynicism	695	2.30	0.39
Academic Efficacy	695	3.75	0.58
Total Burnout	695	3.58	0.54

Table 2 showed the mean scores of students on burnout sub-scales EME, CY, and AE. Total burnout showed the mean score as 3.58, which means that the students moderately experiencing burnout in high school. Burnout mean scores was found on the AE as 3.75 and EME as 3.27. It showed almost same degree of burnout among the 9th grade students whereas, mean scores on CY was found as 2.30, indicated that the students experienced low degree on CY. It indicated that out of three burnout subscales, Emotional Exhaustion (EME) have significant impact on students to increase their burnout whereas, Cynicism (CY) had weak significance to increase the students' burnout.

Discussion

The objective of this study was to investigate the degree of burnout in secondary school students, with a specific emphasis on the sub-scales of Emotional Exhaustion (EME), Cynicism (CY), and Academic Efficacy (AE). Based on the findings of this study, it appears that burnout is not exclusive to secondary school students, as it can manifest in diverse manners. It is worth mentioning that students seemed to be facing a slightly higher level of burnout in terms of their academic effectiveness compared to emotional exhaustion. It is crucial to grasp the fact that students consistently experienced burnout, regardless of their self-sufficiency and confidence in their academic capabilities.^{12/13} It was fascinating to note that cynicism (CY) exhibited the lowest average score, indicating that students showed more interest in their studies while pursuing academic excellence. On the other hand, academic efficacy (AE) and emotional exhaustion (EME) were both found to have significant impacts on students' overall burnout. Although Cynicism (CY) burnout was initially low, it was slowly accumulating, which could eventually result in higher levels of burnout later on. The results of the study were aligned with the previous studies. The well-being of high school students is a cause for concern, as they appear to be increasingly vulnerable to experiencing higher levels of burnout in the coming times. Additionally, the study revealed that burnout can potentially emerge during the early secondary school years. This suggests that students may be encountering feelings of restlessness and burnout as a result of ongoing academic pressures, specifically in relation to Emotional Exhaustion (EME).

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