ECONOMIC CRISIS, EMOTIONAL EXHAUSTION, DEPERSONALIZATION AND PERSONAL ACCOMPLISHMENT OF TEACHERS IN GREECE

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ABSTRACT

This study compares the level of teachers’ professional burnout before and after the onset of the prolonged economic crisis in Greece. Scores of burnout components (Emotional exhaustion (EE); Depersonalization (DP) and lack of Personal accomplishments (PA) were used to compare the periods before (1995–2005; 2005–2010) and after (2010–2015; 2015–2020) the onset of the current economic crisis in Greece. There were significant differences (ANOVA) among different periods, in the scores of EE (P=0.006) and DP (P<0.001). Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated significant differences in the scores for EE before and after the onset of the economic crisis. EE was increased (P<0.05) after the onset of the economic crisis. In the same manner, DP increased significantly (P<0.0001) in papers published five years after the onset of the economic crisis. The level of PA remained similar during the entire period examined in the present analysis but was consistently well above the norms for this component of burnout compared to other countries. Burnout teachers will have difficulty in coping with changes and innovation, reducing the prospects for them to cope with the new and demanding conditions of their job. This could have a significant effect on teaching effectiveness. This dramatic change in two burnout components of teachers has significant implications for school management. EE is considered as an indication of professional stress and be a precursor of depersonalization which requires monitoring and implementation of possible proactive human resources policies.

Contribution/Originality: This study documents an increased risk of professional burnout of teachers in Greece. A rise in Emotional exhaustion and a reduction in level of Personal accomplishment of teachers can be associated with dramatic changes in working conditions at schools after the onset of a prolonged economic crisis.

1. INTRODUCTION

Today, human resource plays a vital role in organizations. The success of any organization or workplace environment directly depends on Human Resource Management (HRM), (Ganapathy & Ashokkumar, 2017). One of the significant parameters which concerns HRM, is the phenomenon of occupational stress which can gradually be established as a condition of chronic workplace stress and gradually lead to burnout (Puertas-Molero et al., 2018).

Burnout is a condition resulting from emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal achievement (Rautakivi, Siriprasertchok, & Korng, 2019). Several parameters affect job satisfaction and burnout. Job burnout occurs as a result of prolonged exposure of workers to physical and psychological stress, which can progressively lead to physical and psychological exhaustion, depersonalization, and a low sense of professional accomplishment.
Subsequently to the exposure to prolonged physical and psychological stress, employees get into "a professional burnout zone" characterized by a decrease in productivity and a lack of job satisfaction (Anastasiou & Papakonstantinou, 2014; Anastasiou & Garametsi, 2020; Sergiovanni, 1967). Occupational stress is a frequent phenomenon that can lead to burnout irrespective of teachers' income (Anastasiou & Papakonstantinou, 2014; Desouky & Allam, 2017). It can reduce the performance of employees and expose them to the risk of professional burnout (Rasool, Wang, Zhang, & Samma, 2020). It is the length of exposure which determines the magnitude of the problem. The severity of the symptoms of burnout increases with the length of exposure, job demands and the severity of adverse working conditions, which increases the likelihood of occupational stress development (Maslach, 2003; Rasool et al., 2020).

High levels of exhaustion characterize stressed employees and negative attitudes toward their work, absenteeism, reduced productivity, low morale, and low job satisfaction. Long term exposure of workers to physical and psychological stress may result in physical and emotional fatigue.

Symptoms of burnout include frustration, mental fatigue, and lack of motivation to perform simple tasks and socialize (Maslach, 2003; Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001; Rasool et al., 2020). According to Maslach et al. (2001) burnout syndrome is documented based on its three components:

1) Emotional exhaustion (characterised by physical and psychological fatigue).
2) Depersonalization (characterised by cynical behaviour and detachment from the job).
3) Reduced personal accomplishment (characterised by feeling inefficient/incompetent at work).

The MBI-educators survey is used to investigate the risk for burnout of teachers. This tool has been widely used and validated for using it in several countries including Greece. The “norms” for each county may slightly vary and can be used a reference for assessing the risk of burnout in teachers.

<p>| Table 1. An example of national norms for the scores of Burnout components of the MBI-educators survey. |
|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>EE</th>
<th>DP</th>
<th>PA</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>33.54</td>
<td>Maslach et al. (2001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td>19.54</td>
<td>5.71</td>
<td>34.93</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Different studies indicate that in Greece, teachers' burnout has been an issue of concern in the profession over the past years (Kamtsios & Lolis, 2016a; Kamtsios, & Lolis, 2016b; Panagopoulos, Anastasiou, & Goloni, 2014; Stagia & Iordanidis, 2014). As a result of the economic problems in Greek central government, austerity measures resulted in the introduction of changes in the working conditions of public servants in Greece. Changes included a reduction in salaries and the number of teachers working in public schools (OECD, 2016, 2018). These changes may have an impact on teachers' job satisfaction and stress. For example, a combination of austerity measures, taxation, reduction of the gross income, and purchasing power disparity of teachers may create conditions that could lead to an increase in job burnout.

During a prolonged period of the financial crisis in Greece, teachers' gross income and generally public servants’ salaries were cut by at least 30% as the country was being faced with rising taxation, increased working hours, and job insecurity (Anastasiou & Anagnostou, 2020; Botou, Mylonakou-Keke, Kalouri, & Tsergas, 2017; Panagopoulos et al., 2014). Therefore, the situation altered the public sector’s safe working environment as it was before the economic turmoil in Greece and teachers faced severe pay cuts. Since 2008 and during the long period of the financial crisis, teachers' gross income in Greece has been drastically reduced with wage cuts as they were considered unproductive in comparison with other public servants.

After the onset of the current economic crisis, employees in several organizations of the public sector in Greece, were faced with limited resources and were obliged to work with dramatically reduced wages and lack of resources. For example, in school and hospitals, salaries were cut by 40%, shortages in staff and lack of resources became a
norm. These conditions can result in emotional resource depletion leading to emotional exhaustion. Indeed, this was exhibited in public hospitals in Greece, were medical supply shortages correlated with the level of emotional exhaustion (Rachiotos et al., 2014). There is some evidence that a similar problem may be observed in Greek schools where there are reports of high level of emotional exhaustion of teachers (Anastasiou & Anagnostou, 2020; Botou et al., 2017; Kamtsios & Lolis, 2016a; Kamtsios & Lolis, 2016b; Panagopoulos et al., 2014; Stagia & Iordanidis, 2014) which can be linked to changes in their working conditions occurred during the current economic crisis in this country.

The current economic crisis resulted in major reorganization of the public sector and the introduced changes in the working conditions in may have had an impact on some parameters of teachers’ job satisfaction and occupational stress. For example, after the economic crisis and the implementation of austerity policies and the introduction of changes in the Greek Public Schools, teachers experience school closures with the simultaneous increase of the number of students in each class and the rapid reductions in their salaries by more than 30% within the last two years. These changes can lead to increased job stress (Kamtsios & Lolis, 2016b; Kyriacou, 2001; Stagia & Iordanidis, 2014) and may have changed the status quo of the historically established Public Sector’s job security in Greece, including public school teachers (Botou et al., 2017; Tsigilis, Zachopoulou, & Grammatikopoulos, 2006). As discussed above, exposure for a prolonged period to work stress and unfavourable working conditions can subsequently lead to emotional exhaustion (Maslach, 2003; Rasool et al., 2020).

The global financial crisis had a negative impact on growth, employment and income in many countries. Countries in Central and Eastern Europe were particularly affected by the global economic crisis leading to a dramatic reduction in public spending, lowering of salaries, redundancies and public sector employment freezes including education (Filippidis, Anastasiou, & Mavridis, 2014; Skrbinjek, Lesjak, & Sušteršič, 2018).

The financial crisis in several countries disrupted the balance between effort and reward of public servants including teachers and this was also reflected in teachers’ salary cuts and increased work load (Perrone, Player, & Youngs, 2019; Stagia & Iordanidis, 2014) which can affect the health and wellbeing of teachers (Solis-Soto, Schön, Parra, & Radon, 2019) and their risk for occupational burnout (Kamtsios & Lolis, 2016b) and affect decision-making processes (Leslie & Canwell, 2010; Niessen, Mäder, Stride, & Jimmieson, 2017).

In times of financial crisis, there are changes in the work environment of educational units that may lead to an increase in teachers’ job burnout levels and affect decision-making processes (Leslie & Canwell, 2010; Niessen et al., 2017).

As a result of the economic problems of the Greek central government, austerity measures resulted in the introduction of changes in the working conditions of public servants in Greece. These changes included reduction in the salaries and the number of teachers working in public schools (Anastasiou, Filippidis, & Stergiou, 2015). These changes may have an impact on teachers’ job satisfaction and stress. For example, a combination of austerity measures, taxation, reduction in teachers’ gross income and purchasing power parity of teachers may create conditions which could lead to increases job stress (Kyriacou, 2001). During a long period of financial crisis in Greece, teachers’ gross income was dramatically reduced experiencing at the same time financial disrespect for their job. In Greece, public servants’ salaries were cut by at least 30% with the country being faced with rising taxation, increased working hours and job insecurity (Panagopoulos et al., 2014) altering the public sector’s safe work environment as it was prior to the economic turmoil in Greece (Grigoriadis & Klefaras, 2017).

A proactive Human resources policy should include monitoring indicators of professional burnout. Emotional exhaustion is a precursor to depersonalization which subsequently can lead to lack of personal accomplishment (Babakus, Cravens, Johnston, & Moncrief, 1999; Maslach, 2003). As a result of the prolonged economic crisis in Greece, teacher may have experience for over a decade, unfavorable working conditions which can lead to occupational stress and burnout. The hypothesis of the present work is that the chronic effects of economic crisis
may increased the risk of Teachers’ to exhibit emotional exhaustion compared to the situation before the onset of the current economic problems in the country.

### 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

A systematic literature research was used to validate the hypothesis on the effect of economic crisis on the risk for Professional burnout of Teachers in Greece. The present work analyzed a random sample of research results on teacher’s burnout in Greece. Published papers were retrieved from the Google scholar database. Search terms used were: Greece, Teachers and Maslach Burnout Inventory. The first two pages of the Google scholar bibliographical research were used to obtain a random sample of published results from two different periods: 1) 1995 to 2010 and 2) 2010 to 2019. The online research was carried out during the first week of December 2019 and only papers in first two pages of google scholar search engine results were screened and used to select published works which had used the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) and were published between 1995-2020. Studies were selected according to the following predetermined inclusion criteria:

(i) Results were reported in full-length peer-reviewed sources. Postgraduate research dissertations which had been graded with 80% or above and were published in online Universities Repositories were also included.

(ii) A randomized selection methodology was used, using only papers listed in the first two pages of the google scholar database research results.

(iii) The results reported were based on a minimum sample size of n≥50 teachers.

(iv) MBI scale was used to report the results.

(v) The Internal consistency was reported using Cronbach’s $\alpha$ coefficient

(vi) The main text of the research work was published in Greek or in English language.

Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) is widely used for estimating the levels of burnout in teachers. It includes 22 questions which estimate the level of three components of burnout: emotional exhaustion; depersonalization and lack of personal accomplishment. The score is calculated according to the responses of participants to each question using a 7-point Likert-scale ranging from 0 (never) to 6 (daily). For each component of burnout, the scores are calculated from the corresponding questions and classified to low, moderate and high level. For example the scores of emotional exhaustion can be classified as above normal when $\geq$ 21.5, depersonalization when $\geq$ 11, and lack of personal accomplishment when $\leq$33.54 (McLean, Eklund, Kilgus, & Burns, 2019). Three burnout components, Emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and Personal accomplishment were used to compare the period before and after the onset of the current economic crisis in Greece. The data were grouped according to the year of the publication in four datasets with papers published between:

- **Period 2005-2010** (Antoniou, Polychroni, & Vlachakis, 2006; Kokkinos, 2007; Tsigilis et al., 2006).
- **Period 2010-2015** (Anastasiou & Papakonstantinou, 2014; Panagopoulos et al., 2014; Stagia & Iordanidis, 2014).

The scores of each burnout component, for the different chronic periods, were compared with one way ANOVA and Post Hoc Tukey’s multiple comparison tests with a 0.05 significance level.

### 3. RESULTS

The mean values of the three burnout components assessed with the MBI were plotted against four different periods. The level of Emotional Exhaustion exhibited a historical low score (19.77±0.50) between 1995-2005 and peaked (26.07±4.00) during 2015-2019 Figure 1.
The level of Depersonalization exhibited a historical low score (3.89±1.01) between 2005-2010 and peaked (10.13±1.54) during 2015-2019 Figure 2.

The level of Personal Accomplishment exhibited similar levels and remained above the score of 33 Figure 3 which is classified to high scores of lack of Personal Accomplishment according to the MBI.

Significant differences (one way ANOVA) were observed in two components of Teachers’ burnout (Emotional Exhaustion $F(4,13)=4.131$, $P=0.031$ and Depersonalization, $F(4,13)=24.540$, $P<0.0001$) over the four different periods examined in the present analysis. Post Hoc Tukey’s multiple comparison tests (with a 0.05 significance level) showed a difference across Emotional Exhaustion between the different periods, with scores of Emotional exhaustion exhibiting significantly higher scores after the onset of the current economic crisis in Greece.

The level of Emotional exhaustion of teachers was significantly lower in papers published between: the periods of 1995-2005 and 2005-2010 compared to the next two periods (2010-2015; 2015-2019).

The level of Depersonalization of teachers was significantly lower in papers published between: the periods of (i) 1995-2005; (ii) 2005-2010 and (ii) 2010-2015 compared to the 2015-20 period.

There was no significant difference in the reported score of Personal accomplishment between the different periods analysed in the present work.

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**Figure 1.** Teachers’ emotional exhaustion before (1995-2000 and 2000-2005) and after (2010-2015 and 2015-2019) the onset of the current economic crisis in Greece. Vertical bars indicate the standard error of the mean. Significant different scores are indicated with at least one different letter.

- Period 2005-2010 (Antoniou et al., 2006; Kokkinos, 2007; Tsigilis et al., 2006).

**Figure 2.** Teachers’ Depersonalization before (1995-2000 and 2000-2005) and after (2010-2015 and 2015-2019) the onset of the current economic crisis in Greece. Vertical bars indicate the standard error of the mean. Significant different scores are indicated with at least one different letter.

- Period 2005-2010 (Antoniou et al., 2006; Kokkinos, 2007; Tsigilis et al., 2006).
4. DISCUSSION

The MBI is widely used to index three complex components of burnout: Emotional exhaustion (EE); Depersonalization (DP) and Reduced personal accomplishments (PA).

After the onset of the current economic crisis in Greece, the scores of EE were significantly increased and reached values which are considered alarming according to the classification of the MBI scores for this component of burnout. The score of DP increased five years later during the economic crisis, and reached equally alarming levels according to the classification of MBI scores. The rise in the level of EE preceded the rise in DP and this is in accordance with the relevant literature (Goddard, O'Brien, & Goddard, 2006). After 2010, teachers exhibited EE scores well above 21.5 which is the norm for this burnout component. The score of DP was 10.13(±1.54) this score is above the score of 11.0 which is the norm score according to the classification of MBI scores. The score of PA remained unchanged over the period studied in the present analysis but was consistently well above the value of 33.5 which is considered as "norm" according to the classification of MBI scores. The high levels of emotional exhaustion exhibited in the teachers who participated in the present work can be a first step prior to depersonalisation and reduced personal accomplishment (Steinhardt, Smith Jaggars, Faulk, & Gloria, 2011).

The current economic crisis in Greece is characterised by cuts in public spending, including teachers salaries which decline by 36% in nominal terms over the past decade (OECD, 2018). After a long period of salary cuts and underfunding of public schools, teachers no longer have the former historically established confidence of job security they enjoyed before the onset of the deep financial crisis in Greece (Panagopoulos et al., 2014; Tsigilis et al., 2006). The results of the present analysis indicate that after the onset of the Greek economic crisis, significant increased level of Emotional exhaustion is reported. Emotional exhaustion is a significant burnout component and has been frequently used to assess the risk of burnout (Bekker, Croon, & Bressers, 2005; Burke & Greenglass, 1995; Corbin, Alamos, Lowenstein, Downer, & Brown, 2019; Macias-Velasquez, Baez-Lopez, Maldonado-Macias, Limon-Romero, & Tlapa, 2019; Schwarzer et al., 2000). Emotional exhaustion is considered as an indication of professional stress and be a precursor of depersonalisation which requires monitoring and implementation of possible proactive human resources policies (Anastasiou & Garametsi, 2020) which could prevent the development of working conditions which generate such problems. The present analysis indicates a similar pattern. With the onset of
economic crisis. Teachers’ EE increased to unprecedented levels, this increase in EE was later followed by an increase in the level of DP, confirming that EE can be a precursor to DP.

This dramatic change in teachers’ two burnout components has significant implications in school management. Emotional exhaustion is considered as an indication of professional stress and be a precursor of depersonalisation which requires monitoring and implementation of possible proactive human resources policies. The possible link between financial crisis, teachers income and burnout components is supported by evidence in other countries were professional burnout can be indirectly related to the income (Azman, Yusof, Zalina, Clara, & Tan, 2009; Desouky & Allam, 2017) of teachers.

The unprecedented levels of teachers’ Emotional exhaustion and Depersonalisation in Greece reported in paper published during the period 2015–2020 are well above the “norm” for the profession in comparison to the historical values in Greece and according to the norms of the MBI Table 1. If it is assumed that working conditions changed dramatically in Greece during the prolonged period of economic crisis (Anastasiou & Garametsi, 2020; Macias-Velasquez et al., 2019) then it is possible to explain the current rise in teachers’ Emotional exhaustion in Greece, particularly in public schools were austerity measures had a severe impact (Anastasiou & Garametsi, 2020; Christopoulos & Monastiriotis, 2016; Zahariadis, 2016). During this period, public school teachers are facing unprecedented job stressors such as job insecurity, relocation and salary reductions (Anastasiou & Garametsi, 2020; Botou et al., 2017). It is unfortunate that this problem coincides with a period which creates the opportunity to reorganize Greek educational system and improve its efficiency.

Burnout teachers will have difficulty in coping with changes and innovation, and perhaps will further be exposed to extra work stress, eliminating prospects for them to cope with the new and demanding conditions of their job. This could have a significant effect on their teaching effectiveness. Proactive human resources policies could help teachers cope with the challenging and demanding conditions they experience in their schools. Pay cuts and disruption of the established relationship between effort and reward, may have a negative impact on teachers’ commitment and performance (Azman et al., 2009; Solis-Soto et al., 2019) but leadership initiatives (Arokiasamy, Abdullah, Ahmad, & Ismail, 2016; Eriksson, Orvik, Strandmark, Nordsteien, & Torp, 2017) can help in safeguarding teachers’ wellbeing and effectiveness.

One of the limitations of the present work was the absence of enough data to investigate the effect of gender, age, work experience and economic hardship on the burnout components investigated in the present systematic literature review. For example, in Greece, male teachers may be considered as bread winners and some are now unable to fulfill the financial expectations of their families. Furthermore, compared to older and more experienced teachers who approach retirement age, young teachers may exhibit increased level of emotional exhaustion and they are the ones which face a long teaching career until retirement. Further research is required to investigate a range of demographic and professional parameters which could moderate the effect of changing working conditions on teachers working in Greece.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The data analysed in the present work, indicate that teachers in Greece exhibited gradually rising levels of Emotional Exhaustion and Depersonalization during the current prolonged economic crisis in this country. These two components of professional burnout indicate that teachers are in risk of burnout. This is an alarming issue which requires proactive initiatives to support teachers during the current prolonged economic turmoil.

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REFERENCES


