Burnout, Job Satisfaction and Emotional Intelligence of Special Education Teachers

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Contribution

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This study was designed to investigate the relationships between burnout, job satisfaction and perceived emotional intelligence (EI) of Greek special education teachers. In the teaching profession, burnout has been linked to dissatisfaction with the job and to negative affective and professional consequences. It is claimed that teachers who work in special education experience more job-related stress than teachers who work in regular education (Billingsley, 2004). Most of the research was carried out in North European and North American countries and indicated high levels of burnout among primary school teachers (Mearns & Cain, 2003). In the Mediterranean countries, research studies have shown that teachers experience moderate levels of stress or burnout. For example, in Malta, 34% of the participant teachers rated their job as either stressful or extremely stressful (Borg & Riding, 1991). In Cyprus, a moderately high emotional exhaustion has been reported among regular education teachers, but not as severe as that of the North Europeans (Kokkinos, 2007). Israeli teachers reported consistently low levels of burnout (Pines, 2004); in Turkey, special education teachers experience relatively high depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment, indicating a limited degree of burnout, but they do not experience severe emotional exhaustion (Sari, 2004). In Greece, all studies examining occupational stress among regular and special education teachers report low levels of stress (Platsidou & Agaliotis, 2008). Regarding the role of EI, it is argued that EI relates somehow to a better adjustment or success at occupational settings. EI appears as an important factor in determining low job stress and high work satisfaction (Bar-On, Brown, Kircaldy, & Thorne, 2000). Success at work is associated with various EI dimensions such as empathy, optimism and conflict resolution (Zeidner, Matthews, & Roberts, 2004). In the teaching profession, it was found that certain components of EI, such as emotional appraisal and positive regulation of emotions, prevent emotional exhaustion that is likely to lead to depersonalization and a low sense of personal...
accomplishment (Chan, 2006). As regards job satisfaction, EI emerged as an important personality-level predictor in teachers (Kafetsios & Zampetakis, 2007). The present study aims to further clarify these associations in special education teachers. Specifically, it aims (a) to investigate their perceived burnout, job satisfaction and EI, in relation to individual differences such as age, gender, teaching experience, marital status, and (b) to examine which of the above variables could be used as significant predictors of burnout dimensions.

Method

The sample was consisted of 127 Greek special education teachers at the primary school level. Three inventories were used: (a) the Maslach Burnout Inventory, (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996), (b) the Employee Satisfaction Inventory (Koustelios & Kousteliou, 2001) and (c) the Emotional intelligence scale (Schutte et al., 1998).

Expected Outcomes

Results showed that the Greek teachers reported lower levels of burnout compared to their American and European counterparts; also, they reported fairly high scores in the specific EI factors and the overall EI. Regression analysis revealed that emotional exhaustion can be predicted by satisfaction with the job itself and with the principal subscales; depersonalization is predicted by satisfaction with the job and with prospective promotions; personal accomplishment is predicted by satisfaction with the job as well as by an EI factor, optimism/mood regulation, and a demographic variable, age. Results are compared to findings from international studies related to teachers, and the associations of EI with burnout and job satisfaction are discussed.

The findings suggest that teachers’ burnout and low job satisfaction is likely to be preventable, if they are helped to enhance their EI with intervention programs that would be available in both in-service and pre-service teacher education.

References


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