

# Burnout and Occupational Stress among Special Educators Working For Children with Hearing, Visual and Intellectual Disability: A Comparative Study

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** Special educators apart from administrative jobs are required to prepare specifically tailored training programmes to cater to the individualized needs and problems of children with disabilities. These needs may be educational, recreational, emotional, social and physical. While doing so they may experience stress and burnout. **Objective:** This paper outlines the level of occupational stress and burn out amongst the special educators in the school for children with intellectual disability and school for children with hearing and visual disability. **Sample:** A total of 47 special educators from both schools for children with intellectual disability and hearing and visual disability were taken up as a sample for this study. **Design:** This is a descriptive study in which comparative design has been used. **Tool:** Maslach Burnout Inventory developed by Maslach and Jackson (1981) was used to assess burnout and the Occupational Stress Index developed by Srivastava and Singh, (1981) was used to measure the extent of stress which employees perceive, arising from various conditions of their job. **Results:** The data was analysed using both descriptive (mean and SD) and inferential methods (t- test). The results showed that there were significant differences in the occupational stress and burn out among the teachers of both schools. **Conclusion:** Occupational stress and burn out was found to be significantly higher among the special educators of school for children with intellectual disability as compared to the ones in school for children with hearing and visual disability.

**Keywords:** Burn Out, Occupational Stress, Special Educators

## Introduction

Appropriate teaching skills are a significant part of special education. The special educators have to understand the similarities and differences in human development. They also hold the responsibility of creating an environment flexible enough to accommodate the varied needs of the students in order to impart instructions to cater to their individualized needs through specialized services. For effective performance it is also important to take into account the psychological well being of the special educators. Some of the variables that enhance their psychological wellbeing are affable and encouraging atmosphere, good texture of interpersonal relationships, sufficient communication, work load, and remuneration. On the other hand overload of work, low school climate and support from colleagues (Wilson, 2002) and extensive efforts put in by the special educators to maximize the potential and capabilities of the children with disabilities lead to stress and burn out. Burnout refers to the emotional exhaustion (attitudinal exhaustion due to extensive work), depersonalization (negative opinion of the concerned persons) which is displayed through withdrawal from contact with students and then is the personal accomplishment (i.e. negative evaluation of one's performance in the job (Maslach & Jackson 1981). Stress on the other hand is perceived as a positive or negative reaction that occurs when there is a considerable amount of imbalance between environmental demands and the capability and potential of an individual who has

to respond (Selye, 1956). According to Borg, Riding and Falzon (1991) stress among special educators occurs due to the way they react to the pressures in their environment and also depends on their skills of dealing with the pressures. Some sources of stress identified by Bensky et al (1980) were the number of students assigned to each special educator, groundwork done for teaching, work beyond the assigned working hours, interaction with parents regarding placement decisions and parent teacher meetings. Apart from this, stress may also be caused by large size of the class, social isolation, fear of violence and ambiguity in the role played at workplace (Travers & Cooper, 1996) and challenging behaviour of children with disabilities (Turnuklu & Galton, 2001). When the special educators try to cope up with the above sources of stress, apart from identifying the learning needs and the behavioural issues of the children with disabilities, it makes their job stressful (Browell, Smith & Miller, 1995).

## Objectives

1. To examine the socio demographic profile of the special educators of school for children with intellectual disability and school for children with hearing and visual disability.
2. To study the burn out among the special educators of school for children with intellectual disability and school for children with hearing and visual disability

- To study the occupational stress among the special educators of school for children with intellectual disability and school for children with hearing and visual disability

## Method

**Sample:** In the present study purposive sampling technique was followed. All special educators from school for children with intellectual disability and from school for children with hearing and visual disability, in Patiala, Punjab were taken up for the study. In total there were 47 special educators in both schools at the time of data collection.

**Design:** This is a descriptive study in which comparative design has been used. The primary purpose of descriptive research is to provide an accurate description of the characteristics of the situation.

## Tools:

Following tools were used to achieve the objective of the present study:

- A specifically constructed interview schedule was used to collect information on the socio demographic profile of the special educators of both the schools.
- Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach and Jackson 1981): This self-report scale has three subscales: a) emotional exhaustion, b) depersonalization, and c) personal accomplishment. The survey consisted of 22 statements that refer to personal feelings and attitudes toward job conditions. The emotional exhaustion subscale included nine items. They describe feelings of fatigue, loss of emotional energy, and tiredness. The depersonalization subscale assessed negative attitudes toward students and environmental settings and perceptions of achieving a person's goals in helping students to learn. The personal accomplishment subscale included eight items which refer to the teachers' perceptions of achieving one's goals of helping students to learn.
- The Occupational Stress Index (Srivastava and Singh, 1981) measures the extent of stress which employees perceive, arising from various conditions of their job. The scale consists of 48 items, each to be measured on five point scale. Twenty eight items are true keyed and eighteen items are falsely keyed. The items are related to job conditions which cause stress. These are role overload, role ambiguity, role conflict, group and political pressure, responsibility for persons, under participation, powerlessness, poor peer relations, intrinsic impoverishment, low status, strenuous working conditions and unprofitability.

## Procedure

The MBI & OSI was administered to the selected sample. Each participant received the MBI & OSI and voluntarily completed it. The participants were explained the aims and objectives of the present study. The administration of the MBI & OSI was schedule

as per the subject's convenience. After completion of the MBI & OSI subjects were thanked for their cooperation by the investigators.

## Results:

The socio demographic profile of the total number of special educators comprised the following details. Number of female special was educators were higher with 63.6%. Around 77.2% special educators were with either certificate and foundation course in special education, BA, MA and B. Ed., M. Ed. special education courses respectively. Apart from this around 54% special educators had the responsibility of junior school children, whereas 40% were responsible for senior school children and rest for the middle group. Around 63% special educators managed children with hearing disability and 36.4% managed children with visual disability. More than 50% were drawing the salary in the range of Rs 6100 -10000 and 36.5% within Rs 20010-30000, and only 4.5% within Rs 14000- 18000.13.6% teachers were with disability and 86.4 % without disability. Around 40.9 % were in the age group of 21-35 years and 27.4% in the age group of 26-30 years.

In the school for children with intellectual disability more than 50% special educators were in the age group of 21-25 years and 36.4% in the age group of 26-30 years. The number of female special educators was higher with 63.6 % .Around 40% special educators were either with certificate and foundation course in special education, BA, MA and B. Ed., M.Ed. Special education courses respectively and more than half with other qualifications .Apart from this 72.7% were responsible for children with intellectual disability and 27.3% for one with multiple disabilities. More than 70% special educators were drawing salary between Rs 2000-6000, rest were proportionately divided in other groups, that is Rs 6100 – 10000, Rs 14000-18000 and Rs 18000-22000 respectively.

**Table-1:** Burn Out among the Special Educators of School for Children with Intellectual Disability and School for Children with Hearing and Visual Disability

Dimensions of Burn Out	Names of Schools of Special Educators	Mean	SD	t value	P
Emotional Exhaustion	School for Children with Intellectual Disability	49.54	3.84	15.02**	0.01
	School for Children with Hearing and Visual Disability	32.50	3.69		
Depersonalization	School for Children with Intellectual Disability	21.77	2.14	7.77**	0.01
	School for Children with Hearing and Visual Disability	15.45	3.16		
Personal Accomplishment	School for Children with Intellectual Disability	8.41	2.02	3.30**	0.01
	School for Children with Hearing and Visual Disability	10.77	2.69		

The data in the table 1 shows that t-test analysis was carried out and the scores indicated that there were significant differences

among all variables of burn out between the special educators of the school for children hearing and visual disability and ones in the school for children with intellectual disability. When seen individually, emotional exhaustion and depersonalization was found to be significantly higher and personal accomplishment lower among special educators of both the schools. There were signs of burnout. When compared, emotional exhaustion was found to be significantly higher among special educators of school for children with intellectual disability than the ones in school for hearing and visual disability ( $t=15.02, P<0.01$ ). Similarly depersonalization was also found to be significantly higher among special educators of school for children with intellectual disability as compared to special educators of the school for hearing and visual disability ( $t=7.77, P<0.01$ ). Personal accomplishment, when seen individually among special educators of both schools was found to be significantly lower but when compared it was found to be lower among special educators of school with intellectually disabled children ( $t=3.30, p<0.01$ ).

**Table-2:** Occupational Stress among the Special Educators of School for Children with Intellectual Disability and Special Educators of School for Children with Hearing and Visual Disability

Sub Variables of occupational Stress	Names of Schools of Special Educators	Mean	SD	t-value	P
Role Overload	School for Children with Intellectual Disability	24.54	2.77	8.60**	0.01
	School for Children with Hearing and Visual Disability	18.27	2.00		
Role Ambiguity	School for Children with Intellectual Disability	15.14	2.49	8.00**	0.01
	School for Children with Hearing and Visual Disability	10.54	1.01		
Role Conflict	School for Children with Intellectual Disability	19.41	2.24	7.47**	0.01
	School for Children with Hearing and Visual Disability	14.95	1.67		
Unreasonable Group & Political Pressure	School for Children with Intellectual Disability	16.14	1.55	7.88**	0.01
	School for Children with Hearing and Visual Disability	12.54	1.47		
Responsibility of Persons	School for Children with Intellectual Disability	14.09	1.95	8.77**	0.01
	School for Children with Hearing and Visual Disability	9.95	1.04		
Under participation	School for Children with Intellectual Disability	12.86	1.55	6.19**	0.01
	School for Children with Hearing and Visual Disability	10.45	0.96		
Powerlessness	School for Children with Intellectual Disability	15.59	1.92	12.91**	0.01
	School for Children with Hearing and Visual Disability	9.09	1.38		
Poor Peer Relations	School for Children with Intellectual Disability	11.68	2.17	1.91	0.06
	School for Children with Hearing and Visual Disability	10.59	1.56		

Overall occupational stress was found to be significantly higher among special educators of school for children with intellectual disability as compared to special educators of school for hearing and visual disability ( $t=10.83, p<0.01$ ). Significant differences were also observed among the means of sub variables of two groups of special educators except poor peer relations. Means of other sub variables for occupational stress i.e. role overload ( $t=8.60, p<0.01$ ), role ambiguity ( $t=8.00, p<0.01$ ), role conflict ( $t=7.47, p<0.01$ ), unreasonable group & political pressure ( $t$  test =  $7.88, p<0.01$ ), responsibility of persons, ( $t=8.77, p<0.01$ ) under participation ( $t=6.19, p<0.01$ ), powerlessness ( $t=12.91, p<0.01$ ). Intrinsic impoverishment ( $t=7.99, p<0.01$ ), low status ( $t=9.15, p<0.01$ ), strenuous working ( $t=7.56, p<0.01$ ), unprofitability ( $t=4.39, p<0.01$ ) were found to be higher among special educators of school for children with intellectual disability than special educators of school for children with hearing and visual disability.

## Discussion

The purpose of the study was to find out, if there were any significant differences in the stress and burn out among the special educators of school for children with intellectual disability as compared to the ones in the school for hearing and visual disability.

The results of the present study show that emotional exhaustion and depersonalization was found to be higher and personal accomplishment lower among special educators of school for children with intellectual disability. Reasons shared by special educators were frequent behavioural problems and high expectations of parents and pressures from school to perform well. These results were consistent with the studies conducted by Clausen & Petruka, 2009 and Geving, (2007) which said that the problems of managing the classroom and challenging behaviours of students' were some major sources of burnout which contributed significantly to depersonalization. Many special educators are unable to cope up with the frequent and prolonged period of stress thus leading to emotion exhaustion and low personal accomplishment and higher predisposition to depersonalization.

When seen individually the scores indicated that special educators of school for children with intellectual disability were in the category of high level of stress. The ones in the school for children with hearing and visual disability children were in the moderate category. When compared, it was seen that occupational stress was found to be significantly higher among the special educators of school for children with intellectual disability than the ones in school for children with hearing and visual disability. Similar views were put forth by Adeniyi (2010), who said that meeting the everyday learning and behavioural needs of students with individual differences not only generates stress in classroom situations but also makes the job of teaching strenuous. Performance of the special educators is affected by the severity of disabilities among the students; if the disability is mild or moderate their performance in the class room is bound to be better than if the disability is severe (Fraser 1996). Apart from this misconduct on the part of students, lack of resources, recognition, and weak interpersonal relationship are some other sources of stress among special educators (Ghani et al, 2014). Some similar sources of stress quoted by Nichols and Sosonowsky (2002) were diversity among students, disobedience, low level of motivation,

lack of administrative support, excess case load and classes, feeling of dissatisfaction among them, role conflict and limited prospects for their professional development. Results were also in line with the model of career burnout proposed by Maslach et.al (2001), which said that burnout consists of six domains (work load, lack of control, insufficient reward, breakdown of community, absence of fair environment and conflicts and contradictions in the value system). When the gap between any of these domains becomes larger, the chances of individual's being prone to burnout are higher.

## Conclusion

Burn out and occupational stress are largely related to the working conditions which maybe in terms of adequate facilities, resources and over all congenial work environment with equal growth opportunities for all .Apart from this challenges faced by the special educators of school for children with intellectual disability are markedly higher because of the unique group of students they work with, where their input is comparatively higher than the output, and overall working is strenuous. Thus it is recommended that they may not be considered at power with any special educator. They should not only be given reasonably small groups of students depending upon the severity of the disability but also be provided with an additional support system to cater to their stress and burnout, which may be in the form of counsellors. Once they are able to manage their own stress and burnout, it will be easy for them to deal with the pressures at workplace.

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