

Burnout levels among housekeepers working in a university

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ABSTRACT

Currently, burnout is problem that is more common than is generally believed. This research is a cross-sectional study that aimed to evaluate the levels of job burnout among housekeepers working in a university. A total of 130 housekeepers were randomized, with data collected between February and May 2019 using a self-administered questionnaire consisting of demographics, occupational factors and the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI). The result shows that 67.7% of participating housekeepers had a low level of emotional exhaustion, 74.6% had a low level of depersonalization, and 76.9% had a high level of personal achievement. Based on these results, the burnout levels of all workers should be assessed, particularly those who work in different sections and who have diverse responsibilities; ii) measures should be taken to reduce the exhaustion and tiredness of personnel; and iii) a shift work system should be applied.

Keywords: Burnout levels, Housekeeper, University

Introduction

Burnout is a medical problem that is more common than is generally believed. It manifests as a reaction to job stress, causing reduced motivation and effectiveness. Burnout has been reported as playing a role in work-related psychological distress among people working in service sectors. Stress, which is the reaction of individuals to demands (stressors) [1], is an integral part of all aspects of life and can play a positive role by increasing alertness among staff in the workplace. Burnout was first proposed in 1974 by Freudenberg, a psychologist; according to the definition of burnout, an individual suffers from burnout when he or she is unsuccessful, is worn down and becomes exhausted as a result of excessive demands on his or her energy, power, and resources [2]. Many studies have attempted to verify the relationship between stress and burnout, and they have also examined the relationship between burnout and employee satisfaction [3], burnout and gender, burnout and workload [4], and burnout and personality [5].

In general, professionals' function at high levels if their work provides positive feedback. Some authors describe burnout as the "progressive loss of idealism, energy, and purpose experienced by people in the helping professions as a result of their work" [6]. The term 'burnout' is not synonymous with 'job stress', 'fatigue', 'alienation' or 'depression', although the recent popularity of the term has led to some

confusion. Three main dimensions describe burnout syndrome: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal achievement. Some studies have found that emotional burnout and depersonalization had a negative impact on the life satisfaction of employees who worked in hotels in China [3].

Housekeepers face job stresses similar to those of other staff members because they strive to provide a clean, healthy, safe, comfortable, and satisfactory environment at the highest level possible. They also work closely and often face to face with people who influence the quality of the perceived service. Housekeepers are required to provide satisfaction directly and to endure long working hours, seven days a week. The risk factors that make the incidence of work-related stress highly relevant to housekeepers include heavy physical workloads and excessive bodily motions that present high risks of back injuries, forceful upper limb motions involving awkward positions that pose a high risk of neck or shoulder and arm injuries, and space limitations necessitating many uncomfortable postures. Interpersonal disharmony and heavy workloads in the workplace are factors that exacerbate burnout syndrome in housekeepers [7]. Here, the levels of burnout among housekeepers working in a university are determined.

Methods

Participants

The study population consisted of housekeepers working in a university; specifically, one of university in Chiang Rai Province, Thailand, was selected as the case study. A total of 190 personnel working in this university composed the population group. Data were collected between February and May 2019. Following Taro Yamane's (1973) [8] formula for $p=0.05$ and Krejcie & Morgan (1970) [9], 130 participants were determined to be a suitable sample size. The research instrument was a self-administered questionnaire that consisted of three parts. The first part contained 11 items and collected demographic data, including gender, age, marital status, the number of family members, the number of children, family caregiving roles, income per month, expenses per month, personal diseases, smoking history and history of alcohol consumption. The second part collected information on occupational factors such as work experience and work rules, while the last part included the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) developed by Maslach and Jackson [10], which was translated into Thai [11]. The MBI is a tool for detecting and measuring the severity of burnout syndrome. It is a 22-item instrument that assesses the degree of burnout in terms of three subscales: i) emotional exhaustion and lack of energy; ii) depersonalization, which is an interpersonal relationship leading to cynicism with negative attitudes regarding patients or colleagues, feelings of guilt, avoidance of social contact and withdrawal into oneself; and iii) personal achievement, which is a feeling of incompetence. For purposes of simplification, regarding personal achievement, an individual has a negative outlook and feels unable to move the situation forward. For each question, scores were rated as low level, moderate or high level (Table 1). A high score in the first two sections and a low score in the last section may indicate burnout.

Table 1 Interpretation of the self-test Maslach Burnout Inventory

Section	Low level	Moderate level	High level
Burnout	17	18-29	30
Depersonalization	5	6-11	12
Personal Achievement	40	34-39	33

Statistical analysis

All items were coded and scored, and the completed questionnaires were subjected to data analysis. The distribution of demographic and occupational factors in the sampling group according to the respondents' demographic characteristics were

given together with frequency and percentage values. IBM SPSS was used to analyze the data.

Results

The housekeepers in this university were mostly female (89.2%), with 10.8% being male. The average age was 41 ± 10.29 years, and most were married (62.2%) with no personal diseases (76.2%) and with more than three people in their family (53.8%). A total of 46.2% had no children, while 29.2% had one child; 66.9% had special caregiving roles in their family such as those involving a baby, an elderly individual, a disabled person and a bedridden person. A total of 46.2% had a monthly income of 5,001-7,000 THB, and 34.6% had monthly expenses of 7,001-9,000 THB. Regarding health behavior, 91.5% were nonsmoking, and 65.4% did not consume alcohol. The average work experience was $4 (\pm 3.87)$ years, and 48.5% of the housekeepers thought that the rules of the workplace were moderately strict (Table 2).

Table 2 Distribution of participants according to their demographics

Factor	n	%
Total	130	100.0
Gender		
Male	14	10.8
Female	116	89.2
Age (years)		
≤ 20	3	2.3
21-30	19	14.6
31-40	44	33.8
41-50	43	33.1
51-60	15	11.5
> 60	6	4.6
Min.=20, Max.=70, Mean=41.46, S.D.=10.29		
Marital status		
Single	26	20
Married	81	62.2
Divorced	11	8.5
Widowed	10	7.7
Separated	2	1.5
Number of family members (persons)		
1-3	60	46.2
>3	70	53.8
Number of children (persons)		
None	64	46.2
1	38	29.2
2	27	20.8
≥3	1	0.8
Family caregiving role		
Yes	87	66.9
No	43	33.1
Income/month (THB)		
≤ 5,000	4	3.1
5,001-7,000	60	46.2
7,001-9,000	59	45.4
> 9,000	7	5.4
Expenses/month (THB)		
≤ 5,000	16	12.3
5,001-7,000	44	33.8
7,001-9,000	45	34.6
> 9,000	25	19.2

Table 2 Distribution of participants according to their demographics (Cont.)

Factor	n	%
Having a medical condition or disease		
Yes	31	23.8
No	99	76.2
Smoking		
Yes	6	4.6
No	119	91.5
Quit	5	3.8
Alcohol consumption		
Yes	29	22.3
No	85	65.4
Quit	16	12.3
Work experience (years)		
< 1	5	3.8
1-3	71	54.6
4-6	29	22.3
> 6	25	19.2
Min.=0.33, Max.=17, Mean=4.1, SD.=3.87		
Housekeeper attitudes toward working rules		
Workplace rules are mostly strict	54	41.5
Workplace rules are moderately strict	63	48.5
Workplace rules are not very strict	13	10.0

Discussion and conclusion

A housekeeper's workload includes cleaning bathrooms, vacuuming and dusting, mopping floors, wiping windows, and collecting and disposing of garbage. Although the literature has explicated the relationship between job stress and burnout, few studies have focused on a housekeeper group, especially in a university environment.

Table 3 Burnout level among housekeepers

Level	Emotional exhaustion		Depersonalization		Personal achievement	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Low	88	67.7	97	74.6	21	16.2
Moderate	28	21.5	12	9.2	9	6.9
High	14	10.8	21	16.2	100	76.9
S.D.	12.62		7.19		16.3	

Previous studies of burnout among housekeepers have found that part of job stress involved high workloads and repetitive tasks, which are common in the housekeeping departments of five-star hotels. Therefore, employees in repetitive jobs are more likely to suffer burnout, leading to a lower sense of accomplishment. In addition to the stress of repetitive work, assigning a large number of rooms and room type allocations inflicts the most stress on housekeepers [12].

In this study, a general assessment was made concerning the degree of burnout of housekeepers who worked in a university. The results indicated that most of the participating housekeepers had a low level of emotional exhaustion, a low level of depersonalization, and a high level of personal achievement, while most thought that the working rules in the university were

mostly strict or moderately strict. The work history survey showed that housekeepers worked for 8 hours, with a 30-60-minute break per day. Compared with previous similar research methods for different occupations with more accountability, such as psychiatrists, almost 80% of Thai psychiatrists had low levels of personal achievement [13]. Almost half of all sales representatives working in pharmaceutical companies had low levels of emotional exhaustion, moderate levels of depersonalization and high levels of personal achievement [14]. Thus, an increase in the daily working hours of housekeepers may increase their levels of burnout. The results suggest that the three items indicating the level of burnout gave no burnout signal among the housekeepers who worked in the university. According to the findings, the following suggestions are made: i) evaluate the results by carrying out studies to determine the burnout levels of housekeepers who work in different sections and who have diverse responsibilities; ii) take measures to reduce the exhaustion and tiredness of personnel that are frequently seen in people subjected to burnout [15], and iii) apply a shift work system.

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