

Burnout Among Librarians in Israel's Academic Libraries: Scope, Rate and Reasons/ Shtern Odelia

Abstract

1. Objective

The objective of this study was to examine the level of burnout librarians in Israel's universities that is to find out if there was any burnout among this group of librarians, what were its scope and reasons and if there were differences in the scope of burnout between various universities.

2. Hypotheses

Research hypotheses were:

1. Factors positively related to level of burnout are : seniority, low professional status, unfavourable staff relationships, job absenteeism, scope of technical problems, rate of nonprofessional library work, scope of exposure to high levels of information.
2. Factors negatively related to level of burnout are : scope of positive feedback, high professional status, positive staff relationships, fair pay level of education, multifaceted job.
3. There are no significant differences between man and women on the job.
4. There are differences in the extent of burnout between various universities.

3. Methodology

The study included five major universities : bar-ilan, tel-aviv, haifa, ben-gurion and the hebrew university in jerusalem.

250 questionnaires titled : "the work of the librarian and his feelings" were randomly distributed among central and divisional libraries in these universities.

The questionnaires were distributed during March of 1998 in anonymity , and 218 full questionnaires were sent back to us in sealed envelopes by the librarians (a response rate of 87.2%).

The questionnaire, which served as a basis for the study, was based on measuring the level of burnout according to MBI scale (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Rate of burnout could be between 0-7, where 0 is not relevant, 1 stands for "not burnout" and 7 stands for "extremely burnout".

4. Main findings

There is a low degree of burnout among librarians working in university libraries in Israel. Based on MBI questionnaire, level of burnout was found to fluctuate between low to medium (between 1-4). Close to 75% of the librarians sampled were between the ages of 41 and 60. The few younger ones had feelings of frustration and lack of self-fulfillment. Fast technological changes were not considered as a main cause for burnout.

Two main approaches to the concept of burnout have been described in the literature: Fruedenberger explains the burnout in terms of personality while Pines, Aronson, Maslach and Jackson elucidate this concept in terms of environmental concepts, i.e looking for stressful condition, instead of seeking features of personality.

Our study supports the second approach to burnout: it seems that the main cause of burnout among academic in Israel librarians is the profession's low status. This determinate is related to work environment and conditions, which are not related to personal features but to environmental conditions that can be manipulated towards change improvement. The study discovered that high degree of burnout and dissatisfaction appeared saliently in the topic of "I and my environment" which included questions concerning the professional status working conditions and motivation. The low status bothers many librarians and appears in several expressions:

1. Large gap between high level of education required from librarians on one hand and the Low financial reward on the other hand.
2. There is a remarkable ignorance among the general public concerning understanding the profession and its complexity. The gap between self and public perception results in low self-estimate among university librarians in Israel.

3. Working conditions in some of the libraries are poor: old and crowded facilities, worn carpets, gray ceiling, bad air-conditioning and so on.

Such conditions, which are in sharp contrast to the fast technological advance of the profession, have a negative effect on librarians motivation to work. Considerable differences were found between libraries occupied with modern technology and those with outdated equipment. In the former ones librarians had professional pride and higher motivation to continue their education, while in the latter ones they felt burnout and neglected. Several recommendations are suggested as well as questions for further research.

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