https://dspace.org/

Kenya: Exploring Burnout among School Teachers and University Lecturers: Part 2 – University Lecturers

Hungi, Njora; Kamonjo, Florence W.; Muriithi, Waweru; Wodon, Quentin

2023-04
International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa
http://ir-library.kabianga.ac.ke/handle/123456789/699

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

unesco
International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa

UNESCO IICBA

Empowering teachers for all learners to thrive

Knowledge Brief 2023-42

Kenya: Exploring Burnout among School Teachers and University Lecturers

Part 2 – University Lecturers

Njora Hungi, Florence W. Kamonjo, Waweru Muriithi, and Quentin Wodon

April 2023

Together with the pressure from demographic growth and gains in educational attainment, teacher stress or burnout is one of the reasons why the teaching profession faces shortages in Africa. Teacher stress and burnout have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. One potential response to high burnout levels is to promote mental health and psychosocial support for teachers and teacher educators in Africa, as discussed in other briefs in this series of briefs. But to do so, a first step is to provide a basic diagnostic of teacher burnout levels.

This two-part brief provides results from an online survey conducted among schoolteachers (Part 1) and university lecturers (Part 2) in Kenya by UNESCO IICBA staff in collaboration with researchers based in Kenya. The survey aimed to answer the following questions: (i) How often do teachers and lecturers encounter selected work-related issues at their institution?; (ii) How much does burnout affect their professional output?; (iii) What mechanisms are available in schools or universities support teachers and lecturers deal with work-related burnout?; (iv) How do teachers and lecturers deal at a personal level with burnout?; and finally (v) How may burnout lead to various effects, including depersonalization, reduced personal accomplishment, emotional exhaustion, reduced job satisfaction, and workload? This brief focuses on results for university lecturers (see Hungi et al., 2023, for a

Background: This brief is part of a series on teacher well-being and practices in Kenya. The work was conducted in part as a contribution to (i) the KIX Africa 19 Hub program of which Kenya is part, and (ii) a program of work at UNESCO IICBA on mental health and psychosocial support for teachers and university lecturers in Africa (that broader work program benefits from funding from UNESCO's O3 – Our Rights, Our Lives, Our Future).

Key findings: This brief explores burnout levels and some of their potential effects among Kenyan university lecturers based on data from an online survey.

- Burnout and its implications can be assessed through online surveys, albeit with limitations. For this brief, a survey of university lecturers was conducted in June-July 2022, with a total of 161 respondents (half men, half women). Results from the survey are instructive but have limitation as the sample is not statistically representative of all lecturers in public and private universities in Kenya.
- The shares of lecturers reporting work-related issues are high. The most common issues are low renumeration, slow job progression, and being over-engaged with work, although many women also mention a lack of control in the workplace.
- The potential effects of burnout include (from the less to more common effects) feelings of reduced personal accomplishment, depersonalization, lack of job satisfaction, emotional exhaustion, and a feeling of high workload. Burnout levels are lower in private than public universities, but with few differences by gender.
- Three in four respondents have at least one support mechanism at work, the most common being a requirement to take annual leave as scheduled. However, most mechanisms identified in the survey are available to less than a third of respondents. At a personal level, when at risk of burnout, respondents use a range of mechanisms to seek support, including reaching out to people close to them. Yet most respondents have not sought professional support and just under two thirds have used at least one personal mechanism to avoid work-related burnout.
- Encouragingly, the analysis suggests that the availability of at least one support mechanism at the university or the use of least one coping mechanism at the personal level seem to be associated with lower burnout levels than otherwise.

detailed analysis; very similar findings are observed for schoolteachers in a separate brief in this series).

Burnout and its implications can be assessed through online surveys, albeit with limitations

While different tools can be used to measure burnout and assess its potential implications, a low cost and rapid approach is to implement online surveys. For this brief, a survey of university lecturers was conducted using an online Google form from June to July 2022. Email messages were sent to an initial group of lecturers inviting them to participate in the survey and encouraging them to share it with colleagues who they thought might be interested in completing the survey. The sample for the analysis consists of 161 respondents who work as university lecturers based in Kenya. The sample is equally balanced in terms of gender (79 men, 80 women, with two additional respondents who did not disclose their sex). A vast majority (83.2 percent) of lecturers were teaching in public universities, with the rest (16.8 percent) teaching in private universities. In terms of age, 26 lecturers (16.1 percent) were below 41 years old, 63 (39.1 percent) were between the age of 41 and 50 years, and 72 (44.7 percent) were above 50 years old. The survey did not collect any personal identifier data. The survey questionnaire is provided in annex.

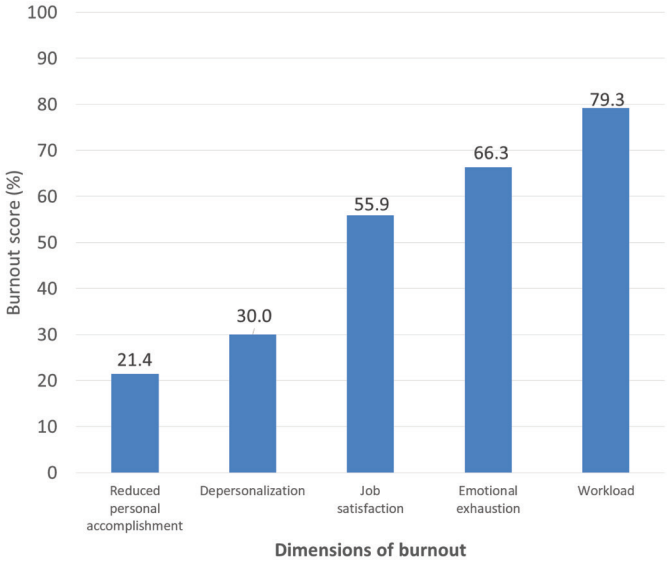
The online survey is a low-cost approach to exploring burnout levels, some of the factors that may lead to burnout, and its potential implications. At the same time, the approach also has limitations. Data collected though short online surveys are limited in terms the information that they provide. Such surveys are most useful when repeated over time as one-time surveys only provide a snapshot at one point of time. In addition, there is self-selection in who responds to the surveys. For this survey especially, results should be interpreted with some caution since they are based on a sample of convenience which may not be statistically representative of burnout levels in Kenyan universities. For example, a larger share of respondents come from public universities than would be warranted by the share of lecturers working in those universities. Nevertheless, the results are instructive, and should be of interest to university administrators in Kenya and other institutions interested in identifying mechanisms to support university lecturers deal with work-related burnout.

Burnout levels appear to be high, with implications for well-being and performance

Work-related issues: The shares of lecturers reporting work-related issues most of the time or all the time are high. The most common issues reported are low renumeration, slow job progression, and being over-engaged with work. Despite some differences, results were somewhat similar for lecturers at public and private universities and by gender although men are more likely than women to mention low renumeration (68.4 percent vs. 57.5 percent), but less likely to mention a lack of control in the workplace (38.0 percent vs. 51.3 percent).

Potential effects of burnout: The effect of burnout mentioned most often is a feeling of exhaustion (either physically or emotionally) followed by a sense of skepticism, but other effects such as insomnia, anger, depression, or anxiety as well as illness are also mentioned. Another way to assess the effects of burnout is to look at whether individuals are affected in five domains of their life. As shown in Figure 1, the share of those affected was at 21.4 percent for feelings of reduced accomplishment, 30.0 percent for depersonalization, 55.9 percent for lack of job satisfaction, 66.3 percent for emotional exhaustion, and 79.3 percent for high workload. In other words, between two thirds and four fifths of lecturers were found to experience work-related burnout with regards to workload and emotional exhaustion. The analysis suggests that burnout levels are lower in private than public universities, especially for depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment. Differences by gender are small.

Figure 1: Burnout Levels Across Five Dimensions (%)



Source: Authors' estimation.

Support mechanisms: Most respondents (77.6 percent) have at least one support mechanism available to them, the most common being the requirement to take annual leave as scheduled (57.1 percent). However, all other support mechanisms are available to less than a third of respondents (i.e., institutional support on identifying potential stressors; training on issues related to stress and burnout; time away to attend conferences, seminars, or workshops; and lounge for relaxation and socialization). At a personal level, when at risk of burnout, respondents use a range of mechanisms to seek support. The most common is reaching out to people close to them, especially family and friends. However, more than two-thirds of (66.5 percent) have never or rarely sought professional support. Overall, just under two thirds (64.0 percent) said that they

used at least one personal mechanism to avoid work-related burnout. Encouragingly, the analysis suggests that the availability of at least one support mechanism at the university or the use of least one coping mechanism at the personal level seem to be associated with lower burnout levels than otherwise.

Takeaways

This brief relies on an online survey to explore burnout among university lecturers in Kenya. Most lecturers report work-related issues such as low renumeration, slow job progression, and being over-engaged with work, although women also mention a lack of control in the workplace. The potential effects of burnout include reduced personal accomplishment, depersonalization, lack of job satisfaction, emotional exhaustion, and a feeling of high workload. Burnout levels are lower in private than public universities, but with few differences by gender. While most respondents have at least one support mechanism at work, most types of support mechanisms are not available. At a personal level, when at risk of burnout, respondents reach out to people close to them, but few seek professional support. There is however evidence that individuals with support mechanisms at work or through their own connections tend to have lower levels of burnout than individuals without those resources. Improving resources available to lecturers for mental health and psychosocial support could help reduce burnout levels as well as some of its potential negative effects.

References

Hungi, N., F. W. Kamonjo, W. Muriithi, and Q. Wodon. 2023. University Lecturers in Kenya: Burnout, Potential Impacts, and Mitigation Strategies. UNESCO IICBA Discussion Paper. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: UNESCO IICBA.

Appendix: Survey Instrument

BURNOUT KNOWLEDGE

Definition of work-related burnout: This section collects information about your knowledge about work-related burnout. In this survey, work-related burnout is defined as "a condition resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed". Please note that work-related burnout is NOT stress that is caused by a condition that is not work-related NEITHER is it a one-off condition like feeling tired or exhausted after a hard day at work.

1. Work-related burnout is caused by many issues. How often do you encounter the following work-related issues as a university lecturer? [Please select one option for each statement]. Potential responses: Never; Rarely; Sometimes; Most of the time; All the time. Modalities: Feeling of little control in the workplace; Lack of social support; Skills that are not in line with my role; Slow job progression or mobility/stagnation; Lack of recognition for my effort; Being unsure about my expectations; A poor working culture; A lack of work-life balance; Being over- engaged with my work; Poor/low remuneration.

2. What level of importance do you associate with the following burnout effects on your professional output as a university lecturer? [Select one option for each statement]. Potential responses: Very low; Low; Medium; High; Very high. Modalities: A sense of skepticism and an overall consistent negative mood or numbness; Frequent headaches, stomach, or bowel problems; Feelings of insomnia (sleep disorder) and fatigue; Frequent feeling of illness; Feelings of anger; Depression and anxiety; Feelings of exhaustion, either physically or emotionally; Increased use/abuse of alcohol and other substances.

3. What support mechanisms are available in your institution to support lecturers deal with work-related burnout? [Select all that are available]. Potential responses: Available; Not Available. Modalities: Presence of institutional support on identifying where the stressors stem from; Presence of a lounge/common room for relaxation and socialization; Requirement to proceed on annual leave as scheduled; Facilitation by the university to spend time away from the institution attending conferences, seminars, workshops, or retreats; Availability of free training on issues related to stress and work- related burnout.

4. On a personal level, how often do you apply the following mechanisms to avoid work-related burnout? [Please select one option for each statement]. Potential responses: Never; Rarely; Sometimes; Most of the time; All the time. Modalities: Taking leave or going on a vacation or extended period of time away from work; Making sure I am eating a healthy diet and staying hydrated; Seeking professional support to help untangle life challenges; Socializing with coworkers; Reaching out to people close to you especially family and friends; Making time to relax such as exercising, taking a walk, and meditation; Setting clear boundaries between work and non-work matters.

BURNOUT PROFILES

This section collects information about your work-related burnout profile

5. The following statements describe feelings and perceptions about the experience of being a lecturer. Please rate how much you agree or disagree with each statement. [Please select one option for each statement]. Potential responses: Strongly agree; Somewhat agree; Agree; Somewhat disagree; Strongly disagree. Modalities: I have a negative attitude and detachment towards students; I feel a lack of personal concern for my superiors; I am insensitive towards

my colleagues; I feel effective in solving the problems of my students; I feel my colleagues truly value my expertise and professionalism; I feel I make a positive contribution toward Institutional goals; I am able to handle all my tasks in set timelines teaching/ marking/ research/ community); I feel I am working too hard at my workplace; I want to be active at work, but somehow, I am unable to manage; When I exert myself at work, I quickly get tired after a day at work, I find it hard to recover my energy; When I get up in the morning, I lack the energy to start a new day at work; I am highly satisfied by my teaching job; Most hours in my working day are spent on work related issues; My compensation is highly rewarding; My Institution offers many opportunities for career/professional development; I am satisfied with guidelines on promotion; Achievement of set guidelines on promotion is difficult; The normal teaching workload at the university is a source of burnout from large classes; Requirements to teach additional courses as part time is a source of burnout; Requirements to take up additional responsibilities such as timetabling/TP supervision/post-graduate supervision are a source of burnout; Requirements to attend regular meetings is a source of burnout; Developing proposals and undertaking research is exhausting; COVID-19 has increased my work personal accomplishments; COVID-19 has increased my work emotional exhaustion; COVID-19 has increased my work engagements; COVID-19 has made me detached from my students; COVID-19 has made me detached from my colleagues; COVID-19 has changed my approach from face-to-face classes to Blended mode classes; COVID-19 has increased my workload.

SOME BASIC INFORMATION ABOUT YOURSELF

We need to collect some basic information about yourself so that we can link responses to your context such as gender, type of university, etc.

6. What is your sex? Potential responses: Male; Female; Prefer not to say.

7. What is your age in years? Potential responses: Under 20; 20-30; 31-40; 41-50; Above 50.

8. What is your marital status? Potential responses: Single; Married; Divorced/separated; Prefer not to say.

9. What is your employment level? Potential responses: Tutorial fellow/Assistant lecturer; Lecturer; Senior lecturer; Associate professor; Full professor.

10. What additional responsibility do you hold in your university? Potential responses: None; Program coordinator; Exams coordinator; Head of Department; Dean; Other.

11. How many years of experience do you have teaching at university level? Potential responses: Under 5; 5-10; 11-15; 16-20; Above 20.

12. Please indicate if your university is classified as a public or a private university. Potential responses: Public university; Private university.

13. In total, how many hours per week are you currently teaching? [Please also include hours involved in moonlighting if applicable]. Potential responses: Under 3 hours; 3-6 hours; 7-9 hours; 10-12 hours; 13-15 hours; 16-18 hours; 19-21 hours; Over 21 hours.

14. What is your teaching subject area? Potential responses: Arts/Social sciences; Education; Science technology/ Engineering; Mathematics; Health sciences; Business related courses; Other.

15. About how far is your home from your university in kilometers? Potential responses: Below 10 km; 11-20 km; 21-30 km; 31-40 km; 41-50 km; 51-60 km; 61-70 km; 71-80 km; 81-90 km; 91-100 km; Above 100 km.

16. On average, about how long (in minutes) does it take you to travel from your place of usual residence to your university during a working week? Potential responses: Less than 30 minutes 30-60 minutes; 61-90 minutes; 91-120 minutes; Above 120 minutes.

17. Please select the option that best describes your current work arrangement. Potential responses: I am a part-time lecturer in only one university; I am a part-time lecturer in two or more universities; I am a full-time lecturer in one university but also moonlighting in another or other universities; I am a full-time lecturer in only one university and not moonlighting in any other university.

18. If you would like us to share with you results of this survey, please provide your email contact below. Your email will not be shared with any third party and it will be used only to send you the results. (You can skip this question if you don't wish to share your email with us).

Disclaimer & Acknowledgment

The analysis in this brief is that of the authors only and need not reflect the views of UNESCO, its Executive Directors, of the countries they represent, nor do they necessarily represent the views of the UNESCO International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa.