

Exploring the factors of Burnout on Special Educators: a Mixed Study

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ABSTRACT

Background: Burnout, a state of chronic emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion, has become an increasing threat to individual well-being and societal productivity. Burnout is a growing concern, impacting individual well-being and overall productivity. This study investigates the factors contributing to burnout among individuals who work with special children (specifically focusing on special educators who were not RCI-licensed).

Methodology: A mixed-methods approach is employed, utilizing Quantitative surveys- to screening purposes; Qualitative interviews- to gain in-depth understanding of participants' experiences and perspectives.

Results: The findings of the study reveal a multifaceted landscape of factors contributing to burnout among individuals working with special children under the theme of Person-Organization Fit, Emotional Well-being, Relationships and Engagement, Coping Mechanisms and Professional Satisfaction and Impact.

Conclusion: Based on the findings, the research aims to highlight the need for targeted interventions and systemic support mechanisms to promote educator well-being and mitigate burnout within this specific group.

Keywords: burnout, special Educators, people working with special children

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INTRODUCTION

The concept of special education has always been intriguing to people of different fields. The term “special needs” are an umbrella term that can refer to a wide range of child diagnoses and/or disabilities. Therefore, the term "children with special needs" (CWSN) refers to children who may have challenges that are more severe than the average child and may last a lifetime. These are children with disabilities or combined disabilities that make learning or other activities difficult. Children with special needs include those who have: a developmental disability that causes them to develop more slowly than other children; speech and language disorders, such as difficulty expressing oneself or understanding others; a physical disability such as visual impairment, cerebral palsy or other illnesses; learning disabilities that distort the messages from their senses; emotional disturbances, such as antisocial or other behavioral problems [1].

Special education in India has been a diverse and evolving field that addresses the educational needs of children with disabilities. In recent years, especially after covid, there has been a significant push towards inclusive education, aiming to integrate students with disabilities into mainstream classrooms. The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act that passed in 2016 [2], strengthened the framework for special education in India by ensuring equal opportunities, protection of rights, and full participation for individuals with disabilities. Special educators work closely with students, parents, and mainstream teachers to develop individualized education plans (IEPs) tailored to each child's needs.

Government initiatives like the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) and the Inclusive Education for Disabled at the Secondary Stage (IEDSS) have been instrumental in promoting inclusive education. Additionally, various non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and special schools across the country provide specialized training, therapies, and support services to children with disabilities.

Special education encompasses the instructional and support services provided to meet the unique needs of students with disabilities. These educators, known as special educators, play a vital role in fostering the academic, social, emotional, and physical development of individuals with diverse learning styles and challenges. Special education teachers are trained to use various teaching methods and adaptive technologies to accommodate different learning styles and abilities. They create inclusive environments that foster a sense of belonging, support emotional well-being, and encourage social interactions among students with and without disabilities. To practice as a special educator, RCI license is a prerequisite.

However, there are other sets of people which this study talks about- people who work with special kids. One of the main differences between them and the special educators is that these individuals are not RCI registered whereas special educators are. They work in similar environments to the special educators but without proper training. Their roles can vary widely, from offering emotional support and personal care to implementing specific therapy techniques or assisting with classroom activities. They often work under the guidance and supervision of special educators, therapists, or other professionals, contributing to a nurturing and inclusive environment for children with special needs.

Burnout

Burnout, a state of chronic emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion, has become an increasing threat to individual well-being and societal productivity. Burnout, according to Maslach and Jackson [3], is a psychological syndrome characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and a reduced sense of self efficacy that can appear in caregivers. Exhaustion includes feelings of overwhelming physical and emotional depletion, resulting in a lack of energy and motivation. Cynicism or Depersonalization includes Detachment from work, negative or callous attitudes towards others, and a sense of decreased efficiency. A reduced sense of self-efficacy means feelings of inadequacy, a decline in self-efficacy, and doubts about one's abilities and contributions.

Factors leading to burnout:

- Excessive Workload
- Lack of Work-Life Balance
- Lack of Recognition and Appreciation
- Poor Communication and Support
- Lack of Control and Autonomy
- Emotional Disconnection
- Chronic Stress
- Perfectionism and unrealistic expectations

By understanding the factors that contribute to burnout, individuals can take proactive steps to prevent and manage this debilitating condition.

Impact of Burnout

It refers to a state of physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion caused by prolonged and excessive stress. When individuals are overwhelmed by their responsibilities and experience a lack of control over their workload, they can develop burnout.

- Physical Impact
- Mental Impact
- Emotional Impact
- Professional Impact
- Long-term Effects
- Preventing and Managing Burnout

Theories of Burnout

Understanding the various theoretical perspectives on burnout sheds light on its complex etiology and facilitates the development of effective interventions. Here are some prominent theories of burnout, each offering a unique lens through which to examine this phenomenon –

Demands-Resources Model (JDR Model) by Schaufeli and Bakker (1996): This widely acknowledged model posits that work demands and job resources are the main determinants of burnout. The JDR model suggests that burnout arises when there is a prolonged imbalance between high demands and low resources, leading to feelings of exhaustion, cynicism, and reduced personal accomplishment [4].

Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory by Hobfoll (1989): The COR theory emphasizes the motivational processes underlying burnout. It posits that individuals are inherently motivated to acquire, maintain, and protect their valuable resources, which can be tangible (e.g., money, time) or intangible (e.g., knowledge, self-esteem). When individuals perceive a threat to their resources, it triggers a stress response [5].

Social Exchange Theory by Blau (1964): This theory focuses on the reciprocal nature of social relationships and how fairness and equity in these relationships affect well-being. Applied to the workplace, it suggests that employees invest their effort and loyalty in exchange for rewards and recognition from their organization. When this exchange is unbalanced, with high effort and low rewards, employees experience feelings of frustration, resentment, and cynicism. These negative emotions, coupled with feelings of powerlessness and lack of control, can contribute to burnout [6].

Maslach and Leiter's (2016) Multidimensional Theory of Burnout: This theory builds upon the three-dimensional conceptualization of burnout by Maslach and Leiter. This theory highlights stress and coping mechanisms as key factors influencing the development of burnout. It postulates that chronic stress leads to emotional exhaustion, which can then motivate individuals to adopt negative coping mechanisms such as cynicism and withdrawal, further exacerbating burnout [7].

The Effort-Reward Imbalance Model: The Effort-Reward Imbalance (ERI) Model, proposed by Siegrist in 1996 suggests that when individuals invest high effort into their work but perceive a disproportionately low return in terms of rewards, they experience negative emotions like frustration, anger, and perceived injustice. This emotional state can lead to a sense of exhaustion, cynicism towards work, and reduced feelings of accomplishment, ultimately contributing to burnout [8].

Maslach and Jackson's Three-Component Model of Burnout: This model defines burnout as a syndrome characterized by three distinct dimensions:

1. Emotional Exhaustion: Feelings of being emotionally drained and depleted of resources, leading to a lack of energy and motivation.
2. Depersonalization: Detachment from work, negative or callous attitudes towards others, and a sense of decreased efficiency.
3. Reduced Sense of Personal Accomplishment: Feelings of inadequacy, a decline in self-efficacy, and doubts about one's abilities and contributions [9].

Person-Organization fit (Kristof, 1996): Person-Organization fit (P-O fit) refers to the match between compatibility between a person and an organization, emphasizing an extent to which the person and the organization share similar characteristics and/or meet each other's needs [10].

Special educators play a vital role in supporting the growth and development of individuals with disabilities. However, their dedication and expertise are often tested by demanding workloads, complex student needs, and limited resources. This challenging environment can lead to burnout, a state of emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and reduced sense of accomplishment, impacting not only their well-being but also the quality of education and support they provide to students. The present study addresses a critical need by exploring the factors contributing to burnout among special educators through a mixed-methods approach.

According to a Meta-Analysis [11] on burnout among special educators by taking 46 quantitative studies and studied them and extended knowledge of burnout among special educators by identification and evaluation of burnout constructs; the meta-analysis of frequently occurring burnout constructs, which indicated the direction and magnitude of these burnout constructs to a number predictor constructs; the

analysis of moderator variables that played a role in the relationship between burnout constructs and predictor constructs.

A quantitative study [12] concluded that there is no significant correlation between self-compassion and level of burnout among special educators which showed the possible influence of mindfulness and self-kindness on the sense of personal accomplishment in the field of special education. According to them, this can mediate the effect of stress on special educators and reduce levels of burnout.

Another study [13] studied/followed special educators over a 5-year period and found that teachers who remained in special education experienced slow but steady increases in emotional exhaustion over time. Some differences in trends were observed among subgroups of teachers. The study highlighted the need for longitudinal research on burnout among special educators after they graduate from preservice programs. It suggests that burnout may develop steadily over time and raises questions about cyclical patterns of burnout. A study [14] among the staff working with Students with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities concluded that coping strategies, specifically emotional coping, were found to be predictors of burnout among Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) staff. Avoidance coping was found to predict higher levels of disengagement among SEND staff. Rational coping was found to predict lower levels of disengagement among SEND staff. These findings highlight the importance of considering individual characteristics in understanding and addressing burnout among SEND staff.

Research Gap

Although many studies have come to conflicting conclusions when comparing special education teachers with mainstream education teachers, some studies found that levels of burnout were similar in both groups and in some to be lesser due to passion. Most studies (that I found) are quantitative and focus on measuring the extent of burnout rather than understanding its causes. My goal is to understand the causes through qualitative research.

The aim of this study was to explore the factors leading to burnout among people who work with special children.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study is done using Descriptive Statistics for Quantitative Study i.e., people who score higher will be screened out and Narrative Research Design with a Semi structured Interview Method for Qualitative Study.

Sample and Technique

A convenience sampling among the people who work with special kids. Sample size was 40 for the quantitative study. They were given a questionnaire to fill and then were screened based on the results of the questionnaire. 5 participants who scored high were then selected for a semi-structured interview. The questions were formed in a semi-structured manner based on the main component- burnout and the sub-components physical and emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, coping mechanism and work-life balance. The interviews were one-on-one and online. The respondents for the interview were females from the age range of 25 to 45, working as educators in special schools; none of them were RCI Licensed or trained.

Inclusion Criteria: People who work among special children.

Exclusive Criteria: People who are RCI licensed, are professionally working as special educators; are trained properly to take care of the needs of the special kids.

Tools for the study

Maslach's Burnout Inventory: The Maslach's Burnout Inventory is a 22 items inventory, invented by Christina Maslach, Susan E. Jackson in the year 1997. It is designed to assess the three components of the burnout syndrome: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. This was administered for screening purpose [9].

Semi-structured Interview: To gather in-depth data on the study's key concepts, eight semi-structured interview questions were developed. These questions underwent expert review to confirm their ability to accurately capture relevant information from participants.

Procedure

This study focused on burnout among special educators in dedicated special education schools. Semi-structured interviews to gain in-depth information about the educators' experiences and perspectives on burnout was used. These interviews allowed for a natural conversation while exploring key burnout themes. All participants provided informed consent, and their recorded responses were transcribed for analysis. Interviews were conducted online or face-to-face based on participant preference, and selection may have been informed by a previous quantitative study.

Data Analysis

The study employs Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis methodology to analyse the data. This approach allows the researcher to apply their theoretical framework to comprehensively describe the data. The thematic analysis process comprises six iterative steps: (1) becoming familiar with the data, (2) generating codes, (3) identifying themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) naming and defining themes, and (6) selecting exemplars. Initially, the researcher familiarized themselves with the data by transcribing and repeatedly reviewing it. Subsequently, initial codes were developed, and themes were identified through iterative examination. Themes were then refined, defined, and labelled, culminating in a thorough thematic analysis of the data.

RESULTS

THEME	SUBTHEME	FREQUENCY
Person-Organization Fit	End-of-Year Burnout Understaffing Stress Inexperienced Staff Strain Maintaining Discipline Adjusting Workload and Schedule Lack of Organizational Support Job Satisfaction	2 5 3 4 5 4 5
Emotional Well-being	Emotional Turmoil Emotional Withdrawal and Coping Mechanisms	11 8
Relationships and Engagement	Continuous Rapport Development Impact on Family Relationships Emotional Investment in Child's Life Difficulty Maintaining Connection Supportive Colleagues in Crisis	4 4 7 5 2
Coping Mechanisms	Work-Life Stress/Balance Healthy Lifestyle Choices Recreational Pursuits Financial Stress/Motivation and Compensation Family/Personal Concerns Overcoming Burnout to Provide Support	10 5 5 5 3 4
Professional Satisfaction and Impact	Quality of Sessions Affected Loss of Motivation Student Progress and Achievements	4 1 3

DISCUSSION

Person-Organization Fit

Firstly, the theme of Workload and Responsibilities encompasses various stressors such as End-of-Year Burnout, Understaffing Stress, Inexperienced Staff Strain, and Lack of Organizational Support.

End-of-Year Burnout and Understaffing Stress are common issues faced by educators, particularly towards the end of the academic year when demands are at their peak and resources may be stretched thin. *"I feel I usually experience burnout towards the end of the academic year. Since throughout the year we must use so much of our creativity to plan our sessions and market unique ideas to teach kids in fun ways and these kids they are so full of energy they want something new all the time and there's no one else who takes the initiative to come up with new ideas."*

Multiple participants feel that one of the reasons of their burnout is due to how low on staff their organisation is. This makes it look like a task for the educators that they just need to get done with. Because of this, eventually, they feel burnt out by the end of the year. *"When you just have one staff working at the moment for like, a three hour or four-hour shift, it's pretty much difficult to handle the whole class, because they are everywhere, doing lots of things and every child need attention. And they also, you know, need care from more than one staff at the same time. And the facility that I was working at was severely understaffed."*

Even with the presence of established RCI laws which state that there should be a 1:7 ratio between teachers and students, participants reported having the responsibility of 12 children along with tasks that were usually for 2 people; one to two people were responsible for majority of the work which included designing curriculums and managing children. In an affidavit submitted to the Delhi High Court by the Rehabilitation Council of India, the teacher-pupil ratio under the scheme of Inclusive Education of the Disabled at Secondary Stage (Social Jurist v. Govt of N.T.C of Delhi, 2009) is 1:8 for primary level and 1:5 for the secondary level. As reported by the participants, they are often given the responsibility of designing of the curriculum or coming up with daily activities along with managing many kids, all at the same time making it stressful for the educator, leading to end of the year burnout.

"It's going to be a lot of stress on that one person who has years of experience because they don't have a team that can work at the same level as them."

According to Stacy Thiry, a counsellor, in an interview, explained end of the year burnout as "when your nervous system has been in a heightened survival state for an extended sustained period of time." Unlike the stress of most, she emphasizes that this burnout comes from stress over a long period of time, especially during the holidays and/or work-related stress. *"When it comes to complicated days or busy days when we have like a lot of things happening at the same time, I feel like everything's on me and that makes me want to come to work less often or makes me want to not be as committed to work as I used to and so by the end of the year, I get super burnt out like I don't feel like going back to work at all."*

This aligns with previous research by Maslach and Leiter [9], who concluded that Chronic workload overload presents a significant barrier to preventing burnout in the workplace. This occurs because excessive job demands consistently deplete an individual's emotional and physical resources, hindering their ability to effectively manage stress and maintain a sense of equilibrium. Without sufficient opportunity for rest and recovery, the capacity to meet job demands diminishes, creating a cycle of exhaustion and potentially leading to burnout.

Inexperienced Staff Strain underscores the importance of having a qualified workforce in educational settings. *"But the main thing that I can think about right now is how my facility lacks enough employees who have adequate training to work with kids with special needs."*

Novice educators may struggle to cope with the demands of the job, leading to increased stress levels and burnout [15].

Maintaining Discipline and Adjusting Workload and Schedule highlights the need for effective time management and organizational skills to mitigate burnout. When asked *"What specific aspects of working with special children do you find most challenging or emotionally taxing?"*, P3 answered- *"even with the smallest thing that could happen with a child, would seem like a lot on us, and that's very emotionally draining."* Research by Hakanen and others [16] emphasizes the role of autonomy and control over workload in reducing burnout risk among employees.

Lack of Organizational Support – “*also the fact that there’s very less support from workplace*”; “*also because there very less support from where I work at*”... The current findings suggest a potential systemic shortcoming within educational institutions. Educators may be experiencing a lack of adequate support in managing their workload and addressing burnout. This aligns with the researchers [17], who emphasized the critical role of robust organizational support structures in mitigating employee burnout. These structures can take many forms, such as providing adequate staffing levels, allocating sufficient resources to meet student needs, fostering a collaborative work environment, and offering professional development opportunities. Unfortunately, many educational institutions nationwide appear to fall short in this crucial aspect. This deficit in support may be even more pronounced in special schools, where educators face unique challenges and require a tailored support system. Special educators may manage a wider range of student needs, navigate complex behavioural issues, and collaborate with a broader team of specialists. Without adequate support structures, these educators may be more susceptible to burnout, potentially leading to decreased job satisfaction, increased absenteeism, and ultimately, a decline in the quality of education provided to students with special needs.

Job Satisfaction is a key determinant of burnout, and the qualitative data reveals a strong connection between job dissatisfaction and burnout among educators. This aligns with research by Schaufeli and others [18] who established a significant negative correlation between job satisfaction and burnout. Educators who experience low levels of job satisfaction are more likely to report feelings of emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and reduced motivation, all hallmarks of burnout.

One participant's statement exemplifies this connection- *“And due to which my job satisfaction was chosen to zero.”* This quote suggests a complete depletion of satisfaction, potentially due to unmet expectations or unaddressed challenges within the work environment. Another participant's response further emphasizes the emotional toll- *“I'm finding it very hard to get myself to feel excited about work.”* This lack of enthusiasm and motivation can significantly impact an educator's ability to perform their job effectively and contribute to feelings of burnout.

Emotional Well-being

The theme of Emotional Well-being has stressors such as Emotional Turmoil and Emotional Withdrawal and Coping Mechanisms.

Emotional Turmoil: The qualitative data underscores the significant emotional toll that working in the field of education can take on educators. This emotional strain is evident as the participant responds stating, *“Burnout did affect my emotional well-being quite badly.”* Another participant responded, *“Burnout has really affected my emotional well-being, in fact, even when I'm at home, I keep thinking about work – about what happened throughout, and it really gets to me.”* This sentiment reflects the pervasiveness of burnout, seeping into educators' personal lives and creating a constant state of worry and emotional fatigue.

These personal accounts highlight the pervasive nature of burnout, extending its influence beyond the professional sphere and impacting educators' personal lives. Research by Maslach and others [19] reinforces this connection, establishing a strong correlation between high levels of emotional exhaustion and burnout. Educators experiencing burnout often report feeling emotionally drained and depleted, lacking the energy and motivation to fulfil their professional duties effectively. The qualitative data presented here aligns with these established findings, suggesting that the emotional toll of burnout is a significant concern for educators. Emotional Withdrawal and Coping Mechanisms highlight the various mechanisms educators utilize to manage their emotional well-being in the face of burnout. One participant's statement, *“I've had days when I've cut out people or shut myself down [because] I didn't know what else to do,”* exemplifies a potential coping strategy. While social withdrawal or emotional isolation may offer temporary relief from work-related stress, these approaches are unlikely to be sustainable in the long run.

Research by Schaufeli and Enzmann [20] underscores the potential drawbacks of unhealthy coping mechanisms. Their work suggests that reliance on such strategies can exacerbate burnout over time. Social withdrawal, for instance, may lead to feelings of loneliness and decreased support networks, potentially hindering an individual's ability to cope effectively with ongoing challenges.

Relationships and Engagement

Under the theme of Relationships and Engagement there are three subthemes, which are Continuous Rapport Development, Emotional Investment in Child's Life and Supportive Colleagues in Crisis.

Continuous Rapport Development underscores the significance of building and maintaining positive relationships with students and colleagues as a protective factor against burnout. This aligns with the research of Bakker and Demerouti [21], who emphasize the role of job resources, such as social support, in mitigating burnout. One of the responses stated *"You have to get in and then get to them [students] and try and make them understand and just be a friend, not a teacher to them, so I think that part really is what I would say the most that burns me out"* suggesting that while rapport building is crucial, the time and effort required to cultivate these relationships can be a significant source of stress for educators, particularly when faced with competing demands and limited resources.

The challenge lies in balancing the emotional investment necessary for rapport development with the need to maintain professional boundaries and manage workload effectively. The findings suggest that educators who reported feeling burnt out often expressed challenges in dedicating sufficient time to building rapport with students due to workload pressures and competing demands highlighting the potential link between workload and the difficulty in establishing positive relationships, which can be a protective factor against burnout.

Emotional Investment in Child's Life emphasizes the deep connection educators feel with their students, which can be both rewarding and emotionally draining. The qualitative data reveals the deep emotional connection educators form with their students, particularly in special needs education. This emotional investment is a double-edged sword, offering both immense rewards and significant emotional strain. One participant articulated, *"The most emotionally draining part of working with special needs kids, is how much you have to be involved in their life."* They may invest considerable time and emotional energy into understanding their students' unique needs, fostering positive relationships, and celebrating their successes. These connections can be a powerful source of motivation and job satisfaction.

However, research suggests that high levels of dedication to work, if not balanced with self-care practices, can contribute to burnout. The emotional intensity associated with working with special needs students may leave educators feeling drained and depleted, especially when faced with limited resources and support.

Supportive Colleagues in Crisis

The qualitative data underscores the critical role of supportive colleagues in mitigating the negative effects of burnout. This aligns with research by Leiter and Maslach [22] who emphasize the importance of social support at work in fostering resilience and preventing burnout. One participant's response exemplifies the power of peer support- *"I feel very, very privileged to have such amazing co-workers, they are the reason I'm able to survive that place; they in a way are my source of motivation."* This highlights how a supportive work environment with positive collegial relationships can act as a buffer against burnout. When educators feel they can rely on their colleagues for emotional support, guidance, and problem-solving, they are better equipped to navigate the challenges of the job and maintain a sense of well-being.

Coping Mechanisms

Coping Mechanisms as a theme as several stressors like Work-Life Stress/Balance, Healthy Lifestyle Choices and Recreational Pursuits, Financial Stress/Motivation and Compensation and Family/Personal Concerns.

Work-Life Stress/Balance underscores the importance of achieving a healthy work-life balance to prevent burnout. This aligns with the research [23], that explored the reciprocal relationship between work and non-work domains in influencing well-being. One participant's statement powerfully captures the detrimental effects of work-life imbalance: *"Because I'm overworking myself. So it's stressful because I've also like noticed that I'm getting a lot more premature wrinkles and grey hair and I'm stressed all the time. I cannot really sleep as well as I used to and I'm trying really hard to just leave my work right outside my workplace but some days it's just not that easy."* This shows the physical and mental toll that work-life imbalance can take on educators. Chronic stress associated with excessive workload can manifest in physical symptoms like sleep disturbances and

premature aging. The participant's struggle to detach from work even outside of working hours suggests the pervasiveness of work-related stress and its impact on personal well-being.

The above-mentioned research suggests that neglecting personal life to prioritize work demands can lead to a negative cycle. Insufficient time for relaxation and rejuvenation can decrease energy levels, reduce motivation, and ultimately hinder job performance. Conversely, a healthy work-life balance allows educators to return to work feeling refreshed and energized, potentially leading to increased productivity and overall job satisfaction.

Healthy Lifestyle Choices and Recreational Pursuits

The responses underscore the importance of self-care practices as a means of mitigating burnout. Engaging in leisure activities and prioritizing physical health can help educators replenish their energy and strengthen their resilience. This aligns with the research of Sonnentag and Fritz [24], who emphasize the role of activities like exercise and hobbies in promoting well-being and preventing burnout. One participant describes their self-care practices- "*Trying to learn the ukulele or I just do some artwork.*" This quote exemplifies the value of engaging in leisure activities that provide enjoyment and a sense of accomplishment outside of the work environment. These activities can serve as a source of relaxation and stress reduction, allowing educators to disconnect from work demands and recharge their emotional batteries. Another participant highlights the importance of physical well-being- "*And I would say it's mainly managing my diet and getting enough exercise.*" Maintaining a healthy lifestyle through proper nutrition and regular physical activity plays a crucial role in managing stress and promoting overall well-being. By prioritizing self-care practices, educators can equip themselves with the necessary resources to cope with the demands of their profession and prevent burnout.

Financial Stress/Motivation and Compensation

This reveals financial stress as a contributing factor to burnout among educators. This aligns with research [27] found that low levels of compensation and perceived inequity in pay can exacerbate feelings of stress and dissatisfaction within the profession. One participant's statement sheds light on the financial challenges faced by educators: "*And I would also say financial stresses because even though it is something that I really enjoy doing, it doesn't pay as well as a lot of the other professionals.*" This quote highlights the potential conflict between job satisfaction and financial security. Educators who are passionate about their work may still experience burnout if they feel their financial needs are not being adequately met. Another participant succinctly expresses a common sentiment: "*and of course there's the whole I don't get paid enough thing.*" Feeling undervalued and undercompensated can lead to decreased motivation, increased feelings of cynicism, and ultimately contribute to burnout.

Financial strain in a way creates a sense of hopelessness and make it difficult for educators to focus on their work. Addressing educator compensation and ensuring competitive salaries can be a crucial step towards mitigating burnout and fostering a more sustainable and rewarding work environment.

Family/Personal Concerns

These responses underscore the importance of acknowledging the interplay between work and personal life when considering burnout. This aligns with the research of Demerouti and others [25] who emphasize the concept of "demand-control imbalance model" which suggests that burnout arises when job demands exceed an individual's resources and control over their work. Personal circumstances and responsibilities outside of work can significantly impact an educator's ability to manage these demands.

One participant acknowledges the broader context of burnout- "*There are definitely other components that contribute to burnout especially factors such as things that are happening back at home or maybe with your friends, your family.*" This shows the reality that educators' lives extend beyond the classroom walls. Stressful events or challenges in their personal lives can create additional demands that deplete their emotional and physical resources, making them more susceptible to burnout. Another participant exemplifies the complexities of balancing work and family life: "*I'm also a mother. So I have to manage things at home as well as go to work.*" For educators who are also parents or caregivers, the pressure to fulfil multiple roles can be immense. The

constant juggling act of work responsibilities and personal commitments can lead to feelings of exhaustion and decreased ability to cope with stress, potentially contributing to burnout.

Professional Satisfaction and Impact

Under the theme of Professional Satisfaction and Impact, Quality of Sessions Affected, Loss of Motivation, Overcoming Burnout to Provide Support and Student Progress and Achievements were the subthemes found. Quality of Sessions Affected or The Impact of Burnout on Student Support underscores the detrimental effect that educator burnout can have on the quality of educational interventions and support provided to students. This aligns with research [26] that emphasizes the importance of a positive teacher-student relationship for fostering student success. When educators are experiencing burnout, their ability to connect with students and provide effective support can be significantly compromised.

One participant's response reflects on the impact of burnout on their teaching - *"I used to be a lot more emotionally healthy back then and not burned out so I could provide the best care by being patient and also, you know, understanding the kids on a deeper level."* This suggests that emotional well-being plays a crucial role in educators' capacity to provide personalized attention and emotional support to their students. Another participant describes the challenges of maintaining quality interactions with students- *"Increasingly more impatient with the children. And that in loads of ways, makes it very hard to be a good teacher to them, because they deserve to have the best care but because of the burnout, I find it extremely hard to perform and connect in the ways I used to."* This statement highlights the potential consequences of burnout on educator-student relationships. Chronic stress and emotional exhaustion can manifest as decreased patience, reduced empathy, and difficulty forming positive connections with students. These strained relationships can ultimately hinder student progress and well-being.

Loss of Motivation highlights the significant impact of burnout on educators' motivation and sense of accomplishment. This aligns with research by Maslach and Schaufeli [27] who identify reduced personal accomplishment and cynicism as key characteristics of burnout. Educators experiencing burnout often report a diminished sense of purpose and satisfaction in their work.

One participant's statement reflects this decrease in enthusiasm- *"I do not feel as enthusiastic or excited to be in class anymore."* This quote suggests a loss of passion and engagement, potentially stemming from feelings of being overwhelmed or undervalued. Without a sense of purpose or excitement about their role, educators may struggle to find the motivation to invest their full energy into their work. Another participant describes the pervasive feeling of simply wanting to get through the workday- *"Most of the days I just tell myself let's just get done with this and get home or whatever."* This statement reflects a sense of detachment and disengagement. Burnout does, in many ways makes the educators view their work as a burden rather than a source of fulfillment, ultimately impacting their overall well-being and job performance.

Overcoming Burnout to Provide Support reflects individuals' resilience and dedication to their role despite experiencing burnout. This aligns with research by Hobfoll and others [28] who emphasize the importance of fostering resilience in mitigating burnout. Even when facing emotional exhaustion and job dissatisfaction, some educators continue to prioritize their students' well-being.

One participant's statement exemplifies this commitment: *"It's kind of become a burden for me but I'm doing it either way because I have to because they deserve to have the best care."* This quote highlights the sense of responsibility and compassion that educators often feel towards their students. Even when their own well-being is compromised, they may persevere in their efforts to provide quality care. Another participant describes their coping strategies: *"There are times when I am overwhelmed and if that happens then I definitely pull out a break and I just pull myself away from the children or the place. And I just, you know, even if it is an emotional breakdown, I go through that and I just come back with a mindset."* This quote emphasizes the importance of self-care practices and emotional regulation in managing burnout.

The paper by Hobfoll [28] suggests that educators who acknowledge their limitations and prioritize their mental health are better equipped to cope with burnout and may experience increased resilience over time. Student Progress and Achievements sheds light on the enduring rewards of working in education, even for those experiencing burnout. These moments of witnessing student progress and achievement can serve as a powerful motivator and source of satisfaction [29]. Even amidst feelings of exhaustion and cynicism, educators may find renewed purpose in the positive impact they have on their students' lives.

One participant describes this internal conflict- *"Though there are times I feel I just want to leave; I look at the changes and improvements that I have seen in a lot of my clients. I also feel very motivated when I see my clients learning a new skill."* This highlights the emotional pull that educators can feel. While the challenges of the job may be significant, the opportunity to witness student growth and development can be a powerful motivator to persevere. Another participant elaborates on these rewarding experiences- *"And that could be times when my students are doing well, or students who used to struggle in the past when they start improving."* This statement emphasizes the importance of educators' role in fostering student success. Seeing their students overcome challenges and achieve their goals can be a source of immense pride and satisfaction, even for educators facing burnout. These moments of positive reinforcement can serve as a buffer against burnout, reminding educators of the significant impact they have on the lives of their students.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, addressing burnout among individuals working in the field of special education requires a comprehensive approach that considers all the themes mentioned above. Reduced class sizes and caseloads would allow the educators to dedicate more individualized attention to students and manage their responsibilities effectively. By providing adequate staffing, sufficient support like paraprofessionals and counsellors can alleviate workload pressures and allow educators to focus on core teaching tasks. Implementing efficient processes and technology can minimize administrative burdens and free up educators' time for planning and instruction. Encouraging educators to prioritize activities that promote physical and mental health, such as mindfulness practices, exercise programs, and access to mental health resources and equipping educators with skills to manage stress, navigate challenging situations, and build resilience might help the educators to regulate their emotional wellbeing. Fostering a culture of open communication could encourage educators to express concerns and access support from colleagues, administrators, or mental health professionals without judgment.

Helping build strong professional learning communities to create spaces for educators to collaborate, share best practices, and provide peer support; investing in mentorship and coaching programs in order to pair experienced educators with new teachers to provide guidance and support and strengthening collaboration with families to foster positive relationships and open communication with families to build a collaborative support network for students would give a chance to enhance the engagement and relationships of the educators with the students, their parents and their co-workers.

Another strategy would be competitive compensation and comprehensive health insurance to help alleviate financial stress and contribute to overall well-being along with encouraging flexible work arrangements and providing resources to help educators manage their workload and personal lives effectively.

Providing opportunities for professional development by offering ongoing training and development opportunities to help educators stay current in their field and enhance their professional skills and involving educators in school improvement initiatives and decision-making processes to foster a sense of ownership and agency; celebrating student progress and teachers' role in it by regularly recognizing the positive impact teachers have on the lives of their students to strengthen the profession's intrinsic motivation and purpose. By implementing these strategies, educational institutions can create a supportive work environment that empowers special needs educators to thrive in their roles, ultimately contributing to positive student outcomes and a stronger education system.

Limitations

The study's sample size and scope may limit the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the reliance on self-report measures may introduce response bias and affect the accuracy of the results. Future research could address these limitations by employing larger and more diverse samples, utilizing mixed-methods approaches with a larger sample size and incorporating objective measures of burnout.

Suggestions for Further Studies

- Future research could explore additional factors influencing burnout in special education, such as organizational culture, leadership styles, and professional development opportunities.

- Longitudinal studies tracking educators' well-being over time could provide valuable insights into the trajectory of burnout and identify effective interventions for prevention.
- Comparative studies examining burnout across different educational contexts and cultural settings could enhance our understanding of the universal and context-specific factors contributing to educator well-being.

In conclusion, addressing burnout in special education requires a multifaceted approach that addresses systemic issues, promotes educator well-being, and fosters supportive learning environments. By acknowledging the challenges faced by educators and implementing targeted interventions, educational institutions can create healthier and more sustainable work environments for all stakeholders involved.

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