

Burnout in College Students

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Literature Review

The institute of Social Research Fall 2019-Spring 2020 Team began researching the topic of “burnout” for the Quality of Life Initiative.

Burnout is defined by the World Health Organization as “a syndrome conceptualized as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully manage.”

- Symptoms of burnout include:
- Fatigue/exhaustion
 - Mental distance from one’s job
 - Feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one’s job
 - Reduced professional efficacy
 - Memory loss
 - Increased susceptibility to heart attacks (WHO, 2019).

All of these symptoms can affect the lives of those experiencing burnout in a negative way, which in turn reduces quality of life.

College students of Utah were surveyed in the Spring of 2019 on the topic of their overall wellbeing. The survey samples are shown as follows:

| | |
|-------------------------------|------|
| • University of Utah | 680 |
| • Utah State University | 1157 |
| • Weber State University | 524 |
| • Southern Utah University | 687 |
| • Snow College | 534 |
| • Dixie State University | 824 |
| • Utah Valley University | 587 |
| • Salt Lake Community College | 209 |
| • Total | 5202 |

Findings by this ACHA NCHA Survey of Spring 2019 show that:

- 89.7% of respondents “felt overwhelmed by all they had to do” in the last 12 month
- 86.3% of respondents “exhausted (not from physical activity)” in the last 12 months
- 63% of respondents “felt overwhelming anxiety” in the last 12 months

Methods

1. A literature review of past research in college students was conducted.
2. A 50 question hard copy survey was created by the ISR team to be taken by a sample of 1346 students at Dixie State University. This survey was distributed to students of different majors and years of education to compare burnout level among them.
3. The survey’s results inputted into SurveyMonkey and analyzed. The results will be published in the Journal of Social Research Vol. II in the summer of 2020.

Data Analysis

The results of the ISR Spring 2020 survey show that:

- 33.96% Freshmen, 38.91% Sophomores, 30.9% Juniors, and 28.97% have trouble falling asleep at night.
- 12.12% Freshmen, 12.19% Sophomores, 16.11% Juniors, and 19.72% Seniors have used the mental health resources at the DSU’s Health & Counseling Center.
- 76.22% Freshmen, 81.17% Sophomores, 82.29% Juniors, and 77.12% Seniors have felt overwhelmed for long periods of time.
- 47.71% Freshmen, 44.54% Sophomores, 58.33% Juniors, and 42.96% Seniors find it difficult to relax.
- 64.02% Freshmen, 66.97% Sophomores, 75.43% Juniors, and 74.38% Seniors dedicate the majority of their time to school over personal or social life.
- 76.13 Freshmen, 68.47% Sophomores, 73.96% Juniors, and 76.84% Seniors are able to manage their time productively.
- 68.94% Freshmen, 62.5% Sophomores, 73.54% Juniors, and 77.66% Seniors are happy with their GPA.
- 30.53% Freshmen, 30.94% Sophomores, 19.72% Juniors, and 10.07% Seniors think they should take more credits next semester.
- 47.55% Freshmen, 44.8% Sophomores, 39.37% Juniors, and 40.5% Seniors say their life is equally balanced.
- 40.53% Freshmen, 37.39% Sophomores, 56.4% Juniors, and 47.72% Seniors feel guilty for taking naps.
- 45.77% Freshmen, 39.09% Sophomores, 37.37% Juniors, and 40% Seniors wake up feeling refreshed.
- 63.77% Freshmen, 59.64% Sophomores, 53.82% Juniors, and 55.63% Seniors intentionally procrastinate.

Burnout and the Societal Contract Theory

The “Societal Contract,” was coined by sociologists Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Jean Jacques-Rousseau (IEP, 2019). The Social Contract Theory is “the view that persons’ moral and/or political obligations are dependent upon a contract or agreement among them to form the society in which they live.” This means that members of a society will accept societal norms into their lives, even if the norms have a negative effect on them. This desire to conform to a society is a way to achieve acceptance into society, which is a survival mechanism. The ISR has researched this theory to see if college students are being taught to accept burnout as a regular part of the college experience.

The problem with burnout being accepted as normal is that it increases the stigma around seeking help for mental health struggles (Mannarini, 2019). This is a problem because if students are constantly feeling stressed or overworked in college, they might brush it off because burnout is not taken seriously in society. They might continue to struggle with these issues despite the negative effects burnout has on their health. Students are being taught that if they’re not experiencing burnout, then they’re not working hard enough. This is dangerous because these symptoms of burnout can become chronic if left unchecked, and can damage their mental and physical health.

But with an increase of awareness on burnout, improvements can be made in student’s lives to prevent student burnout. There is possibility to turn the societal contract around for the better. Students can learn to reject accepting burnout as a norm and instead accept that caring for one’s health is more important than productivity levels in college.

Conclusion

Burnout is an issue in today’s society, particularly in the college. Burnout is accepted in college student’s lives because its symptoms have become an expectation. The results of the ISR Survey of DSU show that students indeed experience burnout in varying levels. With this information, awareness on burnout can help students make changes to live quality lives.

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