

Job Satisfaction and Burnout of Greek Secondary Special Education Teachers

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Abstract

The purpose of the present study was to: a) assess job satisfaction and burnout among high school special education teachers, b) investigate relationships between job satisfaction and burnout and c) investigate the level of prediction of burnout by job satisfaction. The sample was 48 Greek special education teachers (aged 24 to 64 years). Participants completed anonymously the following questionnaires: (1) the Maslach Burnout Inventory (BMI, Maslach & Jackson, 1986), and (2) the Employee Satisfaction Inventory (ESI, Koustelios & Bagiatas, 1997). Multiple stepwise linear regression analysis with six factors of job satisfaction revealed that satisfaction with “job itself” and satisfaction with “organizational as a whole” were significant predictors for “emotional exhaustion”. Furthermore, it appeared that satisfaction with “job itself” was the significant predictor for “personal accomplishment”. The implications are discussed, and recommendations made. The above findings may lead to a better planning of an educational framework and support system for teachers in special education adapted to the new conditions and demands.

Key words: burnout; job satisfaction; special education; secondary education; Greece

1 Introduction

The teachers' job satisfaction in the process of performing their professional responsibilities has been a subject of growing interest in recent years. A reason may be that school teachers, in different cultures are among those professionals with high job stress (Stoeber & Rennert, 2008). As a result, many teachers experience burnout, decreased job satisfaction, and choose early retirement (e.g., Cano-Garcia, Padilla-Munoz, & Carrasco-Ortiz, 2005; Hakanen, Bakker & Schaufeli, 2006). The causes may include increased and demanding workload, problems in parent-teacher relationships, conflicts in cooperating with colleagues, lack of support from the school leadership, and lack of autonomy (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007).

Job satisfaction constitutes a unique concept, but it is affected by various factors (Bloom & Morris, 2002; Carr & Kazanowski, 1994; Sergiovanni, 1967) such as the demands and the characteristics of their job. Thus, job satisfaction may be regarded as an attitude towards the specific job and it is built on the relationship of what someone “receives” from the job and of what “he/she would like to receive” (Chellandurai, 1999). Another factor regards the relationship between the concepts of job satisfaction and burnout. Research findings suggest that, although burnout and job dissatisfaction are linked, they are not identical constructs. Maslach and Schaufeli (1993) used three

hypotheses to explain the nature of that relationship: (a) burnout is associated with decreased job satisfaction; (b) job dissatisfaction is associated with burnout; and (c) both burnout and job dissatisfaction may be related to a third variable, named poor working conditions.

Considering the teaching profession, the aforementioned factors seem very important if someone would like to investigate the educators' feelings towards their job. Previous relative studies have shown a link between dissatisfaction with the specific job and burnout (Kyriacou & Sutcliffe, 1979; Sari, 2004). In addition to that, Mearns and Cain (2003) have shown that the negative professional consequences affected not only the educators themselves but their families, their students and their schools, as well. Furthermore, several studies have suggested various elements of job satisfaction as important predictors of the teachers' burnout. According to several studies, "Satisfaction with the job itself" seemed to be a major predictor regarding both typical education (Koustelios & Kousteliou, 2001; Kyriacou & Sutcliffe, 1979) and special education teachers (Platsidou & Agaliotis, 2008). In addition to that, Koustelios (2001a) identified that "satisfaction with the job itself" seemed to be a significant predictor both for "depersonalization" and "emotional exhaustion" factors of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (BMI, Maslach & Jackson, 1986), while "satisfaction with the job itself" and "satisfaction with promotion" were significant predictors for "personal accomplishment". Another study (Koustelios & Tsigilis, 2005) showed that typical-education teachers' burnout was primarily affected by "job itself", followed by "supervision" and "working conditions". Overall, intrinsic aspects of job satisfaction seemed to correlate stronger to burnout to the extrinsic ones (Koustelios & Tsigilis, 2005).

Previous research findings revealed that educators' feelings toward their job may vary from one region to another due to cultural differences. Studies in Northern Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand have shown relative high levels of dissatisfaction among educators, while similar efforts in Greece, in Cyprus and in Israel revealed rather low levels of dissatisfaction (Platsidou & Agaliotis, 2008). More specifically, studies investigating the relationship between job satisfaction and burnout, revealed that Greek teachers were more satisfied compared to their U.S. colleagues, exhibiting lower trends regarding burnout (Koustelios, 2001a; Koustelios & Tsigilis, 2005). Kantas and Vassilaki (1997), also found that: a) Greek teachers experienced lower levels of burnout compared to teachers from other countries, b) younger teachers experienced more emotional exhaustion than older ones and c) primary education teachers experienced more positive feelings compared to their secondary-education counterparts. Finally, Tsigilis, Zournatzi and Koustelios (2011), suggested that physical education teachers in primary schools were more emotionally depleted in comparison to their secondary school peers. Similar findings have been reported for Israeli (Tatar & Horenczyk, 2003) and Greek-Cyprus teachers (Kokkinos, 2006). Low levels of burnout among Greek physical education teachers have been also reported by Koustelios (2003) and Antoniou, Kourtessis, Koustelios and Papaioannou (2007).

Another important characteristic which may affect the emotional status of the educators toward their profession seems to be the differentiation between typical and special education. The results from few previous studies are contradictory (Platsidou & Agaliotis, 2008). The general trend is that there are no significant differences between the emotional status of regular and special education teachers toward their profession. Stempein and Loeb (2002) compared job satisfaction of special education teachers of emotionally/behaviourally impaired students, general education teachers, and teachers who worked in both settings. Special education teachers were found to be the least dissatisfied. Specific stresses and frustrations, both from within and outside the classroom, were found to be associated with their dissatisfaction. On the other hand, in

the study of Beck and Gargiulo (1983), special education teachers exhibited higher levels of job satisfaction and lower levels of burnout compared to their regular education peers. Similarly, Sari (2004), reported that special school head teachers in Turkey experienced less personal accomplishment than special school teachers. However, there were no significant differences between head teachers and teachers regarding job satisfaction.

The relative research among Greek special education teachers is rather limited (Platsidou & Agaliotis, 2008). However, the existing data are in accord with the aforementioned studies supporting that Greek primary special educators exhibit average to low levels of burnout and relatively high levels of job satisfaction (Motti-Stefanidi, 2000; Platsidou & Agaliotis, 2008). There are findings, however, that may be a call for further investigation. For example, even though no significant correlations have been found among “satisfaction with pay” and “work conditions” and burnout (Maslach & Jackson, 1986), neither for typical education (Koustelios & Kousteliou, 2001) nor for special education teachers (Platsidou & Agaliotis, 2008), the special-education teachers’ satisfaction with pay was much higher. This may imply that the two groups of teachers may be differently affected by specific job satisfaction elements such as “payment”. This latter finding probably stems from the peculiarities of the Greek educational system. Even though Greek teachers hold permanent positions and therefore this fact seems to reduce any stressful feelings, there are some factors which may affect differently those working in regular and special education. According to Platsidou and Agaliotis (2008), some of these factors may be, the additional allowance that is added in the special educators’ monthly payment, the relative independence of the special education teachers’ decision making regarding the curriculum planning as well as the higher feeling of accomplishment that is related to working with children with special needs. Given the limited relative published work, the further investigation of the above relationships seems important.

Conclusively, it seems that most of the existing research data refer mainly to primary and elementary level of special education. As mentioned before, primary regular education teachers experienced more positive feelings compared to their secondary-education counterparts (Kantas & Vassilaki, 1997). Therefore, participants in the current study were all secondary special education teachers. Considering all the above, and combined with the fact that there is rather limited evidence regarding the relationship between job satisfaction and perceived burnout of Greek special education teachers, the purposes of this study were: a) to assess job satisfaction and burnout of secondary special education teachers in Greece, b) to investigate relationships between job satisfaction and burnout and c) to explore the job satisfaction factors that predict special education teachers’ burnout.

2 Methodology

2.1 Participants

Participants in the study were 48 special educator teachers (8 Men and 40 Women) from secondary special education settings in Athens, Greece. They participated in the study voluntarily. Their mean age was 37.46 years (SD=10.7) while their age ranged from 24 to 64 years. Their mean working experience in special education was 9.77 years (SD=9.56, range 1 to 33 years). Their mean working period into the same job was 6.58 years (SD= 8.18, range 1 to 31 years). Finally, their mean workload per week was 27.81 hours (SD= 9.11, range 9 to 40 hours).

2.2 Instruments

The perceived burnout of special education teachers', was assessed by the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI, Maslach & Jackson, 1986), which includes 22 items divided into three subscales: i) nine items refer to emotional exhaustion (i.e. feelings of being over extended and exhausted by work, e.g. "I feel exhausted from my job"), ii) five items refer to depersonalization (i.e. negative, cynical attitudes toward the students, e.g. "I feel like I don't really care about what happens with some of my students"), and iii) eight items refer to personal accomplishment (i.e. negative evaluation of performance and achievement in the job, e.g. "I can easily understand how my students feel"). Participants indicated the frequency of feeling represented by each item on a 7-point scale anchored by 0 (never) and 6 (every day). The specific questionnaire has been developed and validated in the Greek cultural context, and several studies seem to support its good psychometric properties (Kantas, 1996; Kantas & Vassilaki, 1997; Koustelios, 2001a, Koustelios & Tsigilis, 2005). In the present study Cronbach's alpha values for MBI were .89 for emotional exhaustion, .64 for depersonalization, and .73 for personal accomplishment.

Special educators' job satisfaction was measured using the Employee Satisfaction Inventory (ESI, Koustelios & Bagiatas, 1997). ESI is a multifaceted 24-item instrument, which was developed to assess six important aspects of the employees' satisfaction: the job itself (4 items, e.g., My job is worth-while), pay (4 items, e.g., Paid for what I do), promotion (3 items, e.g., Good opportunities), supervision (4 items, e.g., My supervisor stands up for me), working conditions (5 items, e.g., Best I ever had), and organization as a whole (4 items. e.g., The organization looks after its employees). Responses are given to 5-point scale anchored by strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1). Although there are many instruments to measure job satisfaction, ESI was preferred because it has been developed and validated in the Greek cultural context. Several studies seem to support its good psychometric properties, in a variety of professions such as: public servants (Koustelios & Bagiatas, 1997), teachers in primary and secondary schools (Koustelios, 2001a; Koustelios, 2001b; Koustelios & Kousteliou, 1998; Koustelios & Tsigilis, 2005) and early education teachers (Tsigilis, Zachopoulou & Grammatikopoulos, 2006). In the present study Cronbach's alpha values for ESI subscales were .67 for working conditions, .84 for pay, .65 for promotion, .79 for job itself, .87 for supervisor and .70 for organizational as a whole.

Both questionnaires were administered and completed anonymously. In addition to that, participants were assured that the data would be used only for academic purposes. An investigator was always present to answer any questions posed by the teachers.

3 Results

3.1 Reliability Analysis

Internal consistency values as well as means and standard deviations for each factor of both instruments are reported in Table 1.

3.2 Descriptive Data Analysis

The purpose was to assess the perceived levels of job satisfaction and burnout of secondary special education teachers in Greece. The descriptive data are presented in Tables 2 and 3. Furthermore, in order to provide a wider picture of the limited relative

research data in Greece, in the above Tables are also presented data from previous relative studies conducted with Greek primary special education teachers.

Table 1. Internal consistency values and descriptive statistics for both instruments.

Factors	M	SD	Alpha reliability	Items
Maslach Burnout Inventory				
1. emotional exhaustion	20.86	12.54	.89	9
2. depersonalization	4.46	4.02	.64	5
3. personal accomplishment	38.73	6.96	.73	8
Employee Satisfaction Inventory				
1. working conditions	3.37	.68	.67	4
2. pay	2.77	1.15	.84	4
3. promotion	2.44	.85	.65	3
4. job itself	3.96	.90	.79	4
5. supervisor	3.98	1.00	.87	5
6. organization as a whole	3.15	.87	.70	4

Table 2. Descriptive data of the Greek special education teachers on the six job satisfaction dimensions of the ESI.

Job satisfaction Dimension	Current Study ^a (n=48)	Platsidou & Agaliotis ^b (2008, n=127)
Working conditions	3.37 (.68)	2.56 (.93)
Pay	2.771 (.15)	1.91 (.93)
Promotion	2.44 (.85)	1.83 (.77)
Job itself	3.96 (.90)	3.25 (.57)
Supervisor	3.98 (1.00)	3.01 (0.75)
Organization as a whole	3.15 (.87)	2.71 (.71)

Note: ^aStudy at the secondary level of education, ^bStudy at the primary level of education

Table 3. Descriptive data of the Greek special education teachers on the three burnout dimensions of the MBI.

Burnout dimension	Current Study ^a (n=48)	Platsidou & Agaliotis ^b (2008, n=127)	Moti-Stefanidi ^b (2000, n=96)
Emotional exhaustion	20.86 (12.54)	18.66 (9.07)	13.65 (7.61)
Depersonalization	4.46 (4.02)	3.92 (3.81)	2.24 (2.7)
Personal accomplishment	38.73 (6.96)	39.07 (5.52)	39.40 (5.56)

3.3 Correlation Analysis

Pearson Correlation analysis as shown on Table 4 indicated that emotional exhaustion was negatively associated with promotion, job itself, supervisor and organization as a whole. Also, depersonalization exhibited no significant correlation to employee satisfaction. Finally, personal accomplishment had a significant and positive relationship with job itself, supervisor and organization as a whole.

Table 4. *Pearson correlations for all factors.*

Factors	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. emotional exhaustion	1.00								
2. depersonalization	.19	1.00							
3. personal accomplishment	-.59**	-.41**	1.00						
4. working conditions	-.25	-.10	.05	1.00					
5. pay	-.23	.29	-.14	-.22	1.00				
6. promotion	-.37*	.21	.04	-.04	.39**	1.00			
7. job itself	-.64**	-.27	.67**	.30	-.16	.08	1.00		
8. supervisor	-.33*	-.01	.40**	.01	.14	.22	.28	1.00	
9. organization as a whole	-.61**	-.01	.38*	.11	.32*	.38**	.33*	.53**	1.00

Note: ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$

3.4 Multiple Regression Analysis

Multiple stepwise linear regression analysis regarding burnout is summarized in Table 5. Specifically, regression analysis revealed that satisfaction with job itself and satisfaction with organization as a whole were the significant predictors for emotional exhaustion, contributing 63% to the total variance. Regarding personal accomplishment, satisfaction with job itself was the significant predictor, contributing 44% to the total variance. As for the depersonalization no factor emerged as significant predictor.

Table 5. *Multiple stepwise linear regression analysis for prediction of special educators' burnout from job satisfaction.*

Step	Factors of Job Satisfaction	R	R ²	B	SE B	β	F	p
Emotional Exhaustion								
1	Satisfaction with working conditions	.26	.06	-.26	.23	-.13	2.73	n.s.
2	Satisfaction with payment	.39	.15	-.17	.15	-.14	3.42	n.s.
3	Satisfaction with promotion	.47	.23	-.22	.19	-.14	3.52	n.s.
4	Satisfaction with the job itself	.74	.55	-.75	.18	-.48	10.55	.000
5	Satisfaction with supervisor	.74	.55	.14	.18	.10	8.37	n.s.
6	Satisfaction with organizational as a whole	.79	.63	-.60	.23	-.39	9.27	.014
Personal Accomplishment								
1	Satisfaction with working conditions	.09	.01	-.11	.17	-.08	0.17	n.s.
2	Satisfaction with payment	.14	.02	-.09	.11	-.12	0.33	n.s.
3	Satisfaction with promotion	.16	.03	-.10	.14	-.10	0.29	n.s.
4	Satisfaction with the job itself	.66	.44	.55	.13	.57	6.56	.000
5	Satisfaction with supervisor	.71	.51	.17	.14	.19	6.59	n.s.
6	Satisfaction with organization as a whole	.72	.52	.16	.17	.16	5.63	n.s.

Step	Factors of Job Satisfaction	R	R ²	B	SE B	β	F	p
Depersonalization								
1	Satisfaction with working conditions	.08	.01	.04	.19	.04	0.28	n.s.
2	Satisfaction with payment	.28	.08	.14	.13	.20	1.73	n.s.
3	Satisfaction with promotion	.31	.10	.17	.16	.18	1.37	n.s.
4	Satisfaction with the job itself	.37	.14	-.18	.15	-.21	1.56	n.s.
5	Satisfaction with supervisor	.37	.14	.03	.15	.04	1.22	n.s.
6	Satisfaction with organization as a whole	.38	.14	-.07	.19	-.08	1.02	n.s.

Note: n.s., not significant

4 Discussion & Conclusions

The purpose of the present study was: a) to assess job satisfaction and burnout among high school special education teachers, b) to investigate relationships between job satisfaction and burnout and c) to predict burnout from job satisfaction. Relevant studies suggested that Greek educators are more satisfied from their job and their burnout scores are low compared to colleagues from other countries (Kantas & Vassilaki, 1997; Koustelios, 2001a; Koustelios & Tsigilis, 2005).

The results of the present study come in agreement with recent views. Greek high school special education teachers were more satisfied compared to primary special education teachers examined by Platsidou and Agaliotis (2008). More specifically, in the present study, teachers exhibited high satisfaction regarding “working conditions”, “job itself”, “supervisor” and “organization as a whole”. Additionally, participants presented a moderate satisfaction regarding “pay” as well as “promotion”. The above results followed the same pattern with those mentioned by Platsidou and Agaliotis (2008) although educators of the present study were more satisfied in all levels. Similar tendencies have been mentioned in other studies as well (Dinham & Scott, 2000; Koustelios, 2001b; Tsigilis et al., 2006). On the other hand, different views have been stated by Koustelios and Kousteliou (2001) who found that teachers of primary mainstream education had low satisfaction regarding their salary and the potential of promotion. Moreover, and contrary to their secondary education peers of the present study, they stated low job satisfaction regarding “job itself” and “supervisor”. In their effort to explain the above inconsistencies, Platsidou and Agaliotis (2008) recalled the specificities of the Greek Educational System regarding the differences between mainstream and special education. Regarding low salary-satisfaction of special education teachers, the researchers stated that this stemmed from the teachers’ feeling that their additional annual salary was not proportional to the additional requirements and obligations of their job compared to those of mainstream education (Platsidou & Agaliotis, 2008). The requirements for additional workload on planning and implementation of individualized educational programs, the demanding students and families, the emotional load and psychological tiredness are just some of the extra obligations in special education. It should be stressed though that secondary special education teachers who participated in the present study, were more satisfied from their salary ($M=2.77$, $SD=.15$) compared to those in primary education ($M=1.31$, $SD=.93$) who participated in the study of Platsidou and Agaliotis (2008). A possible explanation may be the fact that in secondary education, students are older and therefore more trained and cooperative and therefore the demands for additional workload and effort from the teachers are less. This finding however, should be further investigated.

The Greek educational system does not provide extensive promotion opportunities for special education teachers. This may explain why teachers in

secondary special education were more satisfied ($M=2.44$, $SD=.25$) compared to their colleagues in primary special education ($M=1.83$, $SD=.77$) (Platsidou & Agaliotis, 2008). Even though these scores remain rather low, they reveal that difficulties in promotion are obviously a source of unpleasant feelings for special education teachers. Maybe in the present study the higher scores of secondary special education teachers showcase a type of familiarization and reconciliation with the system. Furthermore, the satisfaction of the job itself may lead teachers to milder confrontation.

Participants in the present study were especially satisfied regarding the working environment. Their responses were positive for certain variables such as “Relations with the supervisor”, “Job itself”, “Working conditions” and “The organization as a whole”. Moreover, they expressed more positive views compared to their colleagues in primary education, as shown in Table 2. The specific finding confirms that teachers in special education were more satisfied with the nature of their job, the working conditions and the relations with the supervisor compared to their colleagues in mainstream education, a fact that comes in agreement with other similar studies (Motti-Stefanidi, 2000; Platsidou & Agaliotis, 2008). The relevant independence of special education teachers regarding the planning and implementing of their work, the special challenges of special education, the moral satisfaction and reward, the respect resulting from their decision to work in such a difficult educational field, are just some of the characteristics that could explain the above findings (Platsidou & Agaliotis, 2008).

According to the present findings, teachers in secondary special education were not burned out. This is in agreement to studies examining teachers in primary special education (Motti-Stefanidi, 2000; Platsidou & Agaliotis, 2008) and teachers in mainstream education (Antoniou, Kourtessis, Koustelios & Papaioannou, 2007; Kantas, 1996; Kantas & Vassilaki, 1997; Koustelios, 2001a; Koustelios, 2003; Koustelios & Kousteliou, 2001; Koustelios & Tsigilis, 2005). Possibly, the permanent working status of teachers in Greece is an important factor resulting to less job related stress and therefore a low burnout sensation. Further, the participants of the present study scored higher in emotional exhaustion and depersonalization and lower in personal accomplishment (Table 3). The ongoing training and therapy that high school students with special needs undergo for many years may lead to boredom, fatigue and amotivation for active participation in classes and school activities in general. This fact possibly create an additional obstacle for teachers to overcome, thus leading to increased emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. This finding should be further examined and explained.

Regarding the relationships between burnout and job satisfaction, the findings of the current study agree with those of Platsidou and Agaliotis (2008). The variables “job itself”, “organization as a whole”, “promotion” and “supervisor” were negatively correlated with “emotional exhaustion”, while the first three were positively correlated with “personal accomplishment”. None of the variables of ESI was significantly correlated with “depersonalization”. The above findings showed that the higher job satisfaction was related to low burnout, and they are in agreement with other similar studies on mainstream education (Koustelios, 2001a; Koustelios & Kousteliou, 2001). In line with the findings of Platsidou and Agaliotis (2008) was the absence of significant correlations among burnout with “salary” and “working conditions”. According to Platsidou and Agaliotis (2008) this finding may explain why salary was not an important cause for job related stress among special education teachers, who in turn, were mostly affected by the type of their work. The opposite however is evident among colleagues in mainstream education who think that salary is very important (Koustelios & Kousteliou, 2001).

The third purpose of the present study was to investigate the prediction of the MBI subscales from the ESI factors (BMI, Maslach & Jackson, 1986). Koustelios and

Kousteliou (2001) found that satisfaction of “job itself” significantly predicted the burnout of teachers in mainstream education which is in agreement with other studies (Koustelios, 2001a; Tsigilis et al., 2006). In the present study the variables “job itself” and “organization as a whole” predicted significantly the “emotional exhaustion”. This finding partly agrees with Platsidou (2010) who found that “supervisor” predicts “emotional exhaustion”, a finding that was not evident in the present study. However, the significant prediction of the variable “organization as a whole” that was revealed in the present study, definitely includes some dissatisfaction towards the supervisor. Additionally, the variable “job itself” was a significant predictor of “personal accomplishment” while no variable significantly predicted “depersonalization”. Similar results were found by Platsidou (2010) who also found that the satisfaction resulting from “job itself” and “promotion” significantly predicted “depersonalization”. The above findings confirm the importance given by teachers in special education to their job and the lower burn out they experience compared to their colleagues in mainstream education. Platsidou and Agaliotis (2008) explained that the conscious choice of special education teachers to be professionals in such a difficult and demanding job has familiarized them with the difficult working conditions, low salaries and small potential in promotion. These working characteristics are overturned by other, more positive, such as respect and gratitude shown by students, parents and significant others.

In conclusion, and considering the limitations of the present study, it was confirmed that teachers in secondary special education exhibited high job satisfaction and low burnout. These findings concur with those regarding their colleagues in primary special education (Platsidou & Agaliotis, 2008). However, it should be noted that the small sample of the present study as well as the fact that data were collected with self-reported instruments are limitations that should be taken under consideration in any future research effort.

In an era where job conditions change dramatically to the worse due to local and worldwide socio-economic crisis, similar research efforts seem necessary and urgent. Any future research should include the investigation of several other characteristics that seem to play a role in job satisfaction and burnout of secondary teachers in special education. The results may lead to the planning of an occupational framework and support system for teachers in special education, respective to the new conditions and demands.

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