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**PRIMARY CAUSES OF BURNOUT IN SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS
AND STRATEGIES TO HELP COPE WITH AND DEAL WITH
THE CHALLENGES OF BURNOUT**

**A MASTER'S THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY
OF BETHEL UNIVERSITY**

BY

MARISSA AUER

**IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTERS OF ART**

NOVEMBER 2023

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AND STRATEGIES TO HELP COPE WITH AND DEAL WITH
THE CHALLENGES OF BURNOUT**

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ABSTRACT

Special education teachers encounter a variety of challenges throughout the academic school year. Burnout among special education teachers has proven to be a complex issue, with many factors playing a role. This thesis explored the primary causes of burnout with special education teachers, as well as some strategies to help cope and deal with burnout with special education teachers. After researching this topic, primary causes for burnout in special education teachers included work environment, interpersonal relationships and workload, role ambiguity and personality traits, and COVID-19. Helpful coping strategies for avoiding burnout included administration support and induction programs, exercise and nutrition, time management and routine, social support and mindfulness, and prayer. As the special education landscape continues to evolve, teachers should proactively find and establish new coping strategies to manage the extensive and complex list of responsibilities that come with serving special education students.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

History of Burnout

Special education teachers encounter a variety of challenges throughout the academic school year. They are given a daunting list of duties and expectations, some of which include being equipped to know the needs and characteristics of different disability categories, creating and monitoring data collection systems for each student, and updating students' Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). In addition, special education teachers are staying up to date on annual review deadlines for each student, communicating and collaborating with students, teachers, parents, paraprofessionals, and administrations on a regular basis (Collins et al., 2017). Special education teachers are expected to balance all these tasks while creating and implementing individualized instruction for each of their students in order to help improve their academic, social, and behavioral skills and abilities. Adding an ever-changing environment with a highly vulnerable population makes these expectations increasingly harder to achieve and maintain.

The expectations placed on special education teachers may result in work-related stress that can lead teachers to feel overwhelmed and exhausted. Special education teachers run the risk of burning out and leaving the profession if these work-related pressures are not addressed and managed. In the 1970s, the concept of burnout was first introduced by the American Psychologist Herbert Freudenberger. After watching staff members in free clinics, Freudenberger defined burnout as a sign of emotional depletion and a lack of motivation and interest (Chang, 2009). Research on burnout expanded past the field of healthcare and found its way into the education system. Given the unique roles and responsibilities, as well as the specific population, special education teachers can be some of the most vulnerable teachers to high levels of stress

and burnout. According to Maslach & Leiter (2016), “Burnout is a psychological syndrome emerging as a prolonged response to chronic interpersonal stressors on the job” (p. 103).

Measuring Burnout

Significant progress in effectively measuring burnout came in 1981 with the development of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI). The MBI is a psychological assessment instrument containing 22 items related to occupational burnout. The original form of the MBI was developed by Christina Maslach and Susan E. Jackson with the goal of assessing an individual's experience of burnout (Maslach et al., 1996). The inventory has a variety of uses including assessing professional burnout in human service, education, business, and government professions.

The MBI examines three factors that assess the risk of burnout, which include emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment. Teachers can experience emotional exhaustion from their jobs when overwhelmed by their workload and workplace interpersonal conflict. When someone is emotionally drained, they can lack the strength and ability to move forward throughout the day and focus on the needs of others around them. Depersonalization is when an individual distances themselves from people emotionally. This can create negative feelings towards students and coworkers, which can affect how they behave and treat other people. This kind of burnout is often brought on by experiencing emotional exhaustion and needing to detach from the job and other people in order to protect themselves. Teachers who experience low personal accomplishment may experience self-doubt and disappointment with their jobs. Lacking the opportunity for professional development and social support can contribute to these emotions of inadequacy and ineffectiveness (Öztürk et al., 2021).

The inventory asks the participant to answer 22 questions that are divided into three subscales: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment. Maslach et al. (1996) summarized the three subscales as follows:

“The nine items in the Emotional Exhaustion subscale assess feelings of being emotionally overextended and exhausted by one’s work. The five items in the Depersonalization subscale measure an unfeeling and impersonal response toward recipients of one’s service, care, treatment, or instructions. For both the Emotional Exhaustion and Depersonalization subscales, higher mean scores correspond to higher degrees of experienced burnout. Because some of the component items on each subscale had low loadings on the other, a moderate correlation exists between the two subscales, which is in accord with theoretical expectations that these are separate but related aspects of burnout. The eight items in the Personal Accomplishment subscale assess feelings of competence and successful achievement in one’s work with people. In contrast to the other two subscales, lower mean scores on this subscale correspond to higher degrees of experienced burnout.” (p. 194)

Each question within the subscales is written in the form of statements about personal feelings and attitudes (e.g., “I feel burned out from my work”). Items are answered with a 7-point scale based on their experiences. A zero means “never” and six means “every day.” Scores are measured separately rather than combined into one total score in order to highlight the results from each subscale (Maslach et al., 1996, pp. 193-194).

The MBI has been widely used in research to measure burnout. While this tool may be useful, it is not used as a scientific diagnostic technique, regardless of the results. The objective is simply to make someone aware that an individual may be at risk of burnout. This inventory

provided a tangible and consistent avenue for measuring burnout. Individuals can compare their scores over time to help determine if burnout is an ongoing issue that needs to be addressed. Even with this inventory tool, teacher burnout has proven to be a complex issue, with many factors playing a role.

The Problem

The complexity of burnout produces a high turnover rate for special education teachers, which has been relatively consistent at 25% over the last 20 years. These high turnover rates have resulted in more open positions nationwide. The Institute of Education Sciences (IES) reported that 44% of public schools in the United States had one or more teaching vacancies in the 2022-2023 school year. Out of those vacancies, 22% were for special education positions (Institute of Education Sciences, 2022). While some teacher turnover can be beneficial, excessive amounts can make it difficult for schools to have a positive impact on students, families, and communities. As special education teachers leave their jobs, teachers who remain working in their roles are faced with picking up the load that remains due to the unfilled positions.

Some of the most at-risk teachers are first-year teachers. Studies have discovered that up to 50% of new teachers quit their jobs within the first few years of teaching (The IRIS Center, 2013). The rate at which new teachers leave their jobs is alarming and exposes an issue of retention in the field of education. These statistics show that solutions for burnout among special education teachers are needed in order to help attract and retain teachers in the future.

Thesis Writer's Experience

The demand for special education teachers has caused schools to start seeking candidates who still need formal teaching experience or education in the area of teaching to fill their vacant

roles. For example, after just completing two semesters of general education coursework, a student who enrolled in a master's program to pursue their special education teaching licensure and who held a bachelor's degree in a field unrelated to education received an offer for a full-time position as a special education teacher with no prior knowledge or experience in teaching. In addition to being hired for a position they were not qualified for, the newly hired special education teacher did not receive a mentor and had little to no support from the staff or administration.

Towards the end of the second year as a special education teacher, this teacher completed the MBI and found that she was experiencing high levels of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, as well as low levels of personal accomplishment. The teacher was able to compare the scores with other special education teachers who were also in their early years of teaching and found that their results were significantly higher than their peers. It was not long before the special education teacher began to contemplate leaving the field of education and pursuing a career elsewhere. The overwhelming workload and lack of support and mentoring led this special education teacher to feel stressed and discouraged in their position. After two years of working as a special education teacher, she decided to leave the field altogether and pursue a career in business. The major contributors to the feelings of burnout included their poor work environment, inadequate training, little to no support from administrators and staff members, and overwhelming amounts of work that hindered their social life and relationships outside of work.

The purpose of this thesis, therefore, is to explore current contributing factors that lead to burnout, as well as discover strategies and solutions to help reduce and prevent burnout for special education teachers.

Thesis Questions

The following questions will be discussed in this thesis. They are as follows:

- 1) What are the primary causes of burnout for special education teachers?
- 2) What are some strategies to help cope and deal with burnout for special education teachers?

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Research Process Overview

The processes for the literature review consisted primarily of researching information using Bethel University's research database on the internet. Peer-reviewed articles and journals were searched using keywords related to the research topic. Articles and journals from the most recent decades were used to provide more recent and up-to-date information. All articles and journals were available online through Bethel University's online library. Additional research databases, such as JSTOR and EBSCO MegaFILE, were used to discover peer-reviewed articles and journals relevant to the topic.

Causes of Burnout

Throughout the process of investigating the question around special education teacher burnout, several studies discussed the leading causes of burnout among special education teachers. In this section, the following causes of burnout will be discussed: Work Environment, Interpersonal Relationships and Workload, Role Ambiguity and Personality Traits, and COVID-19.

Work Environment

Using a longitudinal design, Goddard et al. (2006) surveyed a sample of beginning teachers on four separate occasions in order to study the impact that a work environment has on burnout for beginning teachers. Over a two-year period, data was collected on burnout and impressions of the working environment on three separate occasions after the initial collection of self-report data on burnout, work climate, and neuroticism. Participant perceptions of the work environment were investigated by administering a self-report questionnaire that asked participants to answer questions regarding their working environment. The qualitative data

collected throughout the course of the study showed the consistent presence of various pressures experienced by the beginning teachers. Some of this data included beginning teachers experiencing lower levels of clarity regarding daily routines and perceived their work environments to be less able to accommodate innovative work practices. The study revealed a significant change in how the work environment was perceived by beginning teachers over the two-year timespan. Data showed significant decreases in job commitment, role clarity, and co-worker and supervisor support. This finding ran contrary to the “logical expectation that after 21 months in a new job, graduate teachers might be expected to report increased clarity about their roles, and to have formed better relationships with co-workers and supervisors, and to be more involved in, committed to and autonomous in their teaching work than when first commencing” (Goddard et al., 2006, p. 869). The findings of the study supported the idea that the degree of burnout that beginning teachers report experiencing during their second year of teaching is significantly correlated with how innovative they believe their working environment to be. Workplaces with poor ratings for their capacity to foster creative teaching were consistently linked to large rises in burnout.

Interpersonal Relationships and Workload

Van Droogenbroeck et al. (2014) studied how interpersonal relationships and workload impact teacher burnout. Their inspiration for this study was related to the increasing external pressures that teachers face by policymakers and society at large to achieve academic standards and address growing social concerns, such as drug abuse prevention and health education (Van Droogenbroeck et al., 2014, p. 100). Van Droogenbroeck et al. (2014) added to the existing research by examining how four different interpersonal relationships are associated with the three burnout dimensions (emotional exhaustion, cynical depersonalization, and reduced

personal accomplishment). The four specific interpersonal relationships included students, colleagues, supervisors, and parents. The authors also set out to examine how both teaching-related and non-teaching-related workloads relate to teacher burnout. They considered teaching-related work to be tasks like class preparation and teaching, while non-teaching-related work to be tasks such as administration meetings (Van Droogenbroeck et al., 2014, p. 102).

In their study, Van Droogenbroeck et al. (2014) focused primarily on senior teachers who were 45-65 years old. “The focus on senior teachers is warranted because the consequences of suffering from burnout for older employees in terms of their (re)integration in the labor market prove to be dramatic” (Van Droogenbroeck et al., 2014, p. 100). Data was collected through 1,878 working Flemish teachers, who completed four questionnaires that measured teacher burnout, interpersonal relationships, autonomy and support with policy changes, and teaching-related and non-teaching-related workload (Van Droogenbroeck et al., 2014, p. 104). Teacher burnout was assessed using the Dutch version of the Maslach Burnout Inventory. Interpersonal relationships were measured by looking at the four different dimensions of interpersonal relationships and having participants rank how supportive each relationship was on a scale from 1 to 5. The higher the score, the more positive the relationship. Autonomy was measured by assessing the perceived support that teachers receive when policy change occurs. Van Droogenbroeck et al. (2014) had teachers rate their perception of autonomy on a scale from 1 to 5. A higher score shows more autonomy and perceived support. Teaching-related and non-teaching-related workload was measured by asking teachers how satisfied they were with their workload (1) with teaching-related activities and (2) non-teaching-related activities on a scale from 1 to 5. The lower the score, the more satisfied teachers were with their workload (Van Droogenbroeck et al., 2014, pp. 103-104).

Van Droogenbroeck et al. (2014) showed that higher levels of emotional exhaustion were related to high levels of cynical depersonalization, resulting in lower levels of personal accomplishments. This demonstrates the influence that the three burnout dimensions have on one another. Results also showed a direct relationship between both teaching-related and non-teaching-related workload and emotional exhaustion. The amount of work a teacher experienced, both teaching-related and non-teaching-related, impacted their autonomy and emotional exhaustion. Autonomy was found to be most strongly impacted by the amount of non-teaching-related work (p. 105).

For interpersonal relationships, they discovered that the quality of relationships with students was correlated to emotional exhaustion and cynical depersonalization and associated with personal accomplishment (Van Droogenbroeck et al., 2014, p. 105). The results also showed an indirect association between relationship with students and emotional exhaustion based on teaching-related workload. A positive relationship with students showed lower levels of teaching-related workload, which ultimately led to lower levels of emotional exhaustion (p. 105). Conversely, negative relationships with students can be a predictor for increased stress and burnout. Relationships with colleagues had a clear connection to levels of emotional exhaustion and cynical depersonalization. The same result was found with supervisors. Relationships with supervisors were related to emotional exhaustion and increased autonomy. Parent relationships did not demonstrate any dimensions of burnout (Van Droogenbroeck et al., 2014, p. 106).

In another study, Ibtasam Thakur (2018) examined the relationship between workload and burnout among special education teachers. Thakur defined workload as "... the amount of work one person has to do in order to complete his task" (2018, p. 236). The study was conducted on 374 special education school teachers. Two questionnaires were used to measure

teachers' workload and burnout dimensions. The results of the study showed a negative correlation between workload and all three burnout dimensions. Emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal achievements decreased as teacher workload increased (Thakur, 2018, p. 240).

Ferguson et al. (2012) also took a look at the effects of workload on teachers' anxiety, depression, and job satisfaction. The authors stated, "Teacher job satisfaction may be a critical component for teacher retention..." (Ferguson et al., 2012, p. 29). Their study focused on identifying which occupational stress factors predict anxiety and depression among teachers, as well as identifying significant predictors of teacher job satisfaction. A self-report teacher stress questionnaire was created and used for this study, and 274 northern Ontario teachers successfully completed the questionnaire. The stress factors identified in their study were workload, student behavior, employment conditions, and administration (Ferguson et al., 2012). They found that workload, along with student behavior, were significant predictors of depression and anxiety among teachers. Their study also showed that stress, depression, and years of experience were strong predictors of job satisfaction among teachers (Ferguson et al., 2012).

Role Ambiguity and Personality Traits

Teachers are expected to wear many different hats throughout their careers, that can change from year to year, and student to student. Responsibilities around guiding student behavior, consulting with parents and other teachers, and helping with work-related issues within the school are just some of the expectations put on teachers (Deng et al., 2022). A study conducted by Ghorpade et al. (2011) considered how role conflict and ambiguity increase burnout among teachers. As they stated in their research, they were fascinated by Bühler and Land's (2003) study, which showed that individuals under the same working conditions can

experience different levels of burnout. This curiosity leads them to also take into consideration the impact that an individual's personality type can have on predicting burnout. To begin their study, Ghorpade et al. (2003) had 263 teachers complete hand-delivered questionnaires, which included the MBI, two role conflict and role ambiguity scales, and the Mini-Markers Inventory, which measured the Big Five personality traits (extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, intellect/openness to experience, and emotional stability) (p. 1282). The authors wanted to study how role conflict and personality traits impact burnout, both individually and together.

The study produced multiple findings in regard to role conflict and role ambiguity and personality traits. Teachers who perceived high levels of role conflict and role ambiguity showed higher levels of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, while also showing lower levels of personal accomplishment. They also found that teachers who were clearly indicated as extraverted, agreeable, and emotionally stable reported lower levels of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, as well as higher levels of personal accomplishments. After analyzing the results of role conflict and role ambiguity with the personality traits, they concluded that teachers who perceive lower levels of role conflict and role ambiguity, as well as higher levels of extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, openness to experience, and emotional stability, will demonstrate lower levels of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, as well as higher levels of personal accomplishment. These results demonstrated the impact that role conflict, role ambiguity, and personality traits have on teacher burnout (Ghorpade et al., 2003, pp. 1292-1293). Teachers with lower levels of extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, openness to experience, and emotional stability are more likely to experience higher levels of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, as well as lower levels of personal accomplishments.

COVID-19

In March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) announced a worldwide pandemic, known as COVID-19. During this time, teachers were faced with unprecedented circumstances, implementing alternative teaching approaches while facing the stressors of a global pandemic. The new expectations and requirements placed on teachers only added to their already full workloads before COVID-19 started (Ferguson et al., 2012). Tim Pressley (2021) suggested that it was important to understand how these new challenges brought on by COVID-19 may have impacted burnout among teachers.

Pressley (2021) was among the first to conduct the study of burnout due to COVID-19. 359 teachers in K-12 across the United States were used to conduct this study. Electronic surveys were sent out in the first week of October 2020. The survey included four scales, including the COVID Anxiety Scale (CAS), seven one-item anxiety questions, and two different teacher burnout subscales. The author's analysis examined eight predictor variables, including teaching, communication with parents and administrators, COVID-19, and administration support. Pressley (2021) wanted to determine if these variables were predictors of teacher burnout during the fall of 2020. The results of this study showed that all four variables were significant predictors of teacher burnout. Ethnicity, location, or years of experience showed no difference in teacher burnout (Pressley, 2021, p. 327).

Less than a year after Pressley's (2021) study was completed on the impacts of COVID-19 on teacher burnout, Shimony et al. (2022) also conducted a study focusing on the factors affecting teachers' burnout during COVID-19. The goal of this study specifically looked at the factors that contributed to teacher burnout during the first and second waves of the pandemic. Shimony et al. (2022) identified the first wave taking place from February through May of 2020 and the second wave taking place from June through October of 2020 (p. 5). There were 344

elementary teachers who participated in this study. They completed questionnaires that measured independent variables, which included stressors, needs and sources of support, anxiety, resilience, coping strategies, and self-efficacy. Dependent variables measured in the questionnaires were burnout and commitment to teaching (Shimony et al., 2022, p. 5). For the purpose of this study, they only looked at two components of burnout: personal fulfillment and emotional exhaustion.

After data was collected, the authors looked at some of the general statistics gathered from the data, along with the different correlations between predictor variables of burnout. They found that more than 60% of the teachers reported moderate to high levels of anxiety, and 39.83% of teachers reported high anxiety (Shimony et al., 2022, p. 8). Shimony et al. (2022) also found the following:

“As expected, both commitment to teaching and personal fulfillment (the 1st factor of burnout) were positively correlated with the predictors of psychological resilience and self-efficacy beliefs, and negatively correlated with state anxiety. Furthermore, commitment to teaching and personal fulfillment had a significant negative correlation with the gap in support (i.e., the gap between the support needed and the support received) and with stressors. In other words, the larger the gap between needs and provided support, and the higher the level of stressors, the lower the commitment to teaching and the sense of fulfillment” (p. 8).

The authors also found that emotional exhaustion (the 2nd factor of burnout) had a negative correlation with resilience and self-efficacy beliefs. In other words, lower levels of resilience and self-efficacy resulted in higher levels of emotional exhaustion (Shimony et al., 2022, p. 9). When taking a look at COVID-19 related stressors, Shimoney et al. (2022) found that remote teaching

and insufficient support of remote teachings contributed to lower levels of professional commitment and anxiety. It was noted that remote teaching during COVID-19 revealed more significant predictors of burnout compared to other stressors, which included physical health, mental health, and economic and employment stressors (Shimony et al., 2022).

Solutions for Burnout

Researchers have been increasing their attention not only on factors that cause burnout but also on strategies to help cope and deal with the challenges of burnout among special education teachers. In this section, the following strategies of reducing burnout among teachers will be discussed: Administration and Induction, Exercise and Nutrition, Time Management, Social Support and Mindfulness, and Prayer.

Administration and Induction

Cherniss (1988) studied the relationship between supervisory behavior and burnout. Instead of sending out questionnaires for teachers to complete with paper and pencil, the author used an objective and structured behavior observational instrument called the Development of the Supervisor Behavior Observation Scale (SBOS). It contains six dimensions, which include communication, function (or purpose), content, target, tone, and location (Cherniss, 1988, p. 451). Within each dimension were several specific categories that helped specify each dimension. The subjects of the study consisted of the principals and staff of two different schools that served students with severe disabilities. The specific types of disabilities were not shared in the study. The first school was chosen by a principal at a school that was not involved in this study and stated that the school chosen had lower levels of burnout. This statement was based on low staff turnover rates and overall low staff scores on the MBI. The second school chosen for this study showed moderate levels of burnout from staff on the MBI. For this study, the first

school was considered the Low Burnout School, and the second school was the Moderate Burnout School (Cherniss, 1988, p. 452). The principals from each school were observed on at least two different days in three different weeks. These observations were done randomly throughout the day, and the observer would shadow the principal and follow them wherever they went.

The author found that the Low Burnout School principal interacted significantly more with other administrators. They also made significantly more statements to staff and offered more support compared to the Moderate Burnout School. The principal at the Low Burnout School spent more time talking with staff about work-related problems and concerns of the staff. On the other hand, they found that the Moderate Burnout School principal spent more time listening to staff and engaging in small talk, such as discussing the weather or recent movies playing in town. The study suggested that direct involvement in work-related issues and offering support may help lower levels of burnout among school staff (Cherniss, 1988).

Leko and Smith (2010) also suggested that administrators offering support to their teachers can have a positive impact on retention. More specifically, they suggest that investing in induction programs can help keep beginning special education teachers. According to Griffin et al. (2003), induction can be defined as “a phase in teacher development that occurs during the first year of teaching and focuses on novices’ concerns and problems of practice” (p. 8). Administrators can ensure that teachers are receiving the support they need through induction. Smith & Ingersoll (2004) conducted a study that looked at the effects of induction on beginning teacher turnover. They wanted to see if teachers who participated in induction activities, such as mentoring or staff collaborations, were more or less likely to remain in their jobs the following year. Their sample consisted of 3,235 first-year teachers from 1999 to 2000

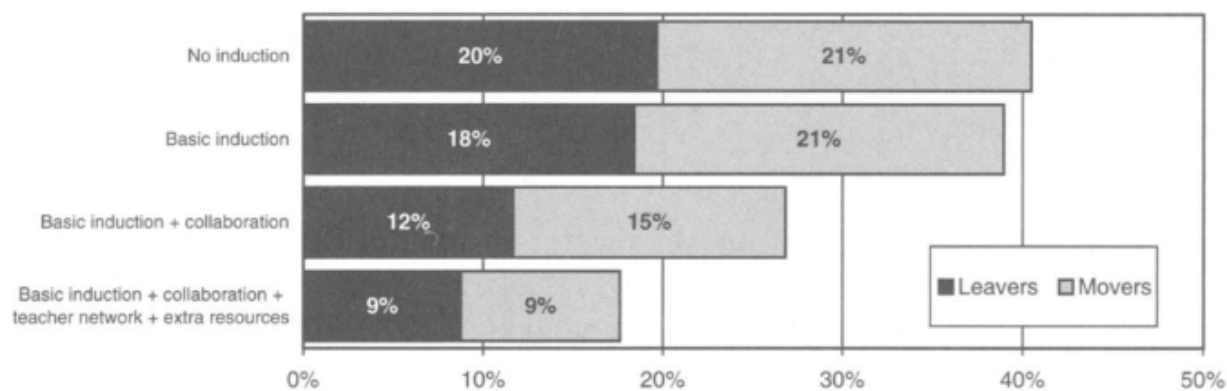
(Smith & Ingersoll, 2004, p. 687). Their study was split into two different stages. The first stage focused on collecting data on induction, mentoring, and turnover by using the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), which is administered by the National Center of Education Statistics (NCES). In the second stage, they studied the impact of mentorship and other induction activities on the participation of beginning teachers by using the Teacher Follow-up Survey (TFS) (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004, pp.687-688).

The authors discovered through their data that induction practices can vary and rarely exist in isolation. Teachers can receive a variety of induction support, which led the authors to come up with different induction packages that vary in the number of supports. The first package only had a few supports that were most commonly used for beginning teachers, while the last package had the most supports but included supports that are less frequently used. **Figure 1** shows the turnover percentage for each package. The results showed that only 3% of beginning teachers from their study received no induction support during the school year, which resulted in a projected turnover rate of more than 40%. The second package was considered a basic induction package, and it included a mentor and supportive communication with the principal, administrators, or the department chair. The authors found that 56% of beginning teachers from their study received this basic package of induction. The predicted turnover rate for this package was 39%. The third package consisted of the basic induction package plus collaboration. This meant that in addition to the components in the second package, it also included a seminar for beginning teachers and regularly scheduled planning time with other teachers in the same subject areas. The authors found that 26% of beginning teachers received this third package on induction, and the predicted turnover rate for them was 27%. The fourth and final package included the basic induction package plus collaboration, as well as teacher network opportunities

and extra resources. In addition to receiving the same support as the third package, this fourth package also included opportunities to connect and network with external teachers, a reduced amount of preparations, and the support of an assigned teacher's aide. They found that 15% of beginning teachers were given this package of induction, and the predicted turnover rate was 18%. This is less than half the probability for teachers who did not receive any induction package (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004, p.705).

Figure 1.

Predicted Probability of turnover after the first year of teaching by various induction "packages."



From Smith, T. M., & Ingersoll, R. M. (2004). What are the effects of induction and mentoring on beginning teacher turnover? *American Educational Research Journal*, 41(3), p. 705.

<https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312041003681>

Exercise and Nutrition

Teaching has been identified as a high-stress profession that can impact the overall health of teachers (Queen & Queen, 2012). According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, work-related stress can lead to poor health and even injury. Some early warning signs of work-related stress include headaches, sleep disturbances, difficulty concentrating, short

temper, upset stomach, job dissatisfaction, and low morale. Work-related stress can also lead to cardiovascular disease, musculoskeletal disorders, psychological disorders, workplace injury, suicide, cancer, ulcers, and impaired immune function (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014).

A study conducted by Isoard-Gauthier et al. (2019) confirmed a correlation between job burnout and stress. Their objective was to examine the relationship between physical activity and burnout. They had 369 administrative and technical university staff members participate in the study. To measure stress, they used the Perceived Stress Scale, a brief self-report scale that measures the extent to which an individual experiences different feelings and thoughts. To measure burnout, they used the Shirom Melamed Burnout Measure scale. This scale contains 14 items that represent three dimensions of burnout: physical fatigue, cognitive weariness, and emotional exhaustion. To measure physical activity, they used the one-item four-level Saltin Grimby Physical Activity Level Scale, which asks a series of questions in regard to an individual's physical activity level (Isoard-Gauthier et al., 2019, p.352). The results of the study showed that stress was positively associated with all three dimensions of burnout. They also found that physical activity helped reduce cognitive weariness and emotional exhaustion. This supported their belief that physical activity plays a significant role in preventing job burnout (Isoard-Gauthier et al., 2019, p.352).

Latino et al. (2021), completed a similar study that examined the impact of a yoga exercise program on teachers who reported having stress and depressive symptoms because of burnout. The overall goal of the study was to highlight the importance of using physical exercise as a way to help support teachers who are experiencing burnout. There were 40 teachers who participated in this study. The teachers participated in an eight-week training program, which

consisted of 16 training sessions that included 10 minutes of a gentle warm-up, 40 minutes of the main exercise, and five minutes of cool-down (Latino et al., 2021, p. 4). To highlight the impacts of a yoga exercise program, they split the participants into two groups. The experimental group received the yoga-specific intervention, while the control group received bodyweight and pilates exercises. Prior to the training sessions, as well as after the sessions were completed, participants were given two questionnaires that measured their psychological functioning. The first was the State Mindfulness Scale (SMS), and the second was the Maslach Burnout Inventory: Educators Survey (MBI-ES) (Latino et al., 2021).

Results from the study showed that the experimental group that received the yoga intervention training had a significant decrease in emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. They also found that their personal accomplishment scores significantly increased by the end of the training sessions. In regards to participants' state of mindfulness, the experimental group showed significant improvements in both state mindfulness of body sensations and state mindfulness of mental events. The authors concluded that the eight-week yoga exercise intervention program significantly decreased burnout symptoms and that teachers would benefit from incorporating structured yoga sessions into their schedules. (Latino et al., 2021).

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (2015), combining physical activity with good nutrition can help maximize health and advance overall well-being. "Good nutrition refers to eating the proper amounts of nutrients that the body needs on a daily basis for energy and for all body processes" (Queen & Queen, 2013, p. 87). A study was completed by Virtanen et al. (2022) that studied the relationship between healthy food and work engagement. They found that participants who

consumed healthy food items were more satisfied with their financial situation, were more physically active, and had high work engagement levels (Virtanen et al., 2022, pp. 5-7).

Figure 2 shows USDA's MyPlate, which gives a visual indicator of the proportions an individual should have on their plate for each different food group. These suggestions help ensure that the body is receiving the right levels of nutrients for optimal health. The recommended amounts include filling half of the plate with fruit and vegetables and the other half with whole grains and lean protein-rich foods. Any dairy products, like milk, cheese, and yogurt, should be low-fat or fat-free if possible (Queen & Queen, 2013, p. 88).

Figure 2.

The USDA's MyPlate



From Queen, J. A., & Queen, P. S. (2013). *The frazzled teacher's wellness plan: A five-step program for reclaiming time, managing stress, and creating a healthy lifestyle* (2nd ed.). Corwin. p. 87.

Queen & Queen (2013) stated that an individual's environment can have an impact on the food choices that people make. Easy access to vending machines in the break rooms with high

sugar and sodium snacks or fast food restaurants that are quick and easy to pick up on the commute home can all help encourage poor eating habits. One way teachers can avoid eating unhealthy food is by eating regular meals throughout the day. The article suggested that starting off with a breakfast that includes fiber, complex carbohydrates, and lean protein can help provide the energy that is needed for morning activity. The authors also suggested that teachers should make sure healthy food options are within their reach when they become hungry. Replacing a desk drawer full of candy with fresh fruit, trail mix, or low-fat and low-sodium popcorn is a great strategy to help promote healthy eating (Queens & Queen, 2013, p. 91).

Time Management

Special education teachers may experience burnout due to an excessive workload and expectations. A study was carried out by Peeters & Rutte (2005) that looked at the effects of time management on teachers experiencing burnout. They started off by defining time management since there was no widely accepted scientific definition of the term at the time. Peeters & Rutte defined time management as "... setting and prioritizing totals, planning tasks, and monitoring progress" (2005, p. 65). They hypothesized that teachers with poor time management behaviors will experience burnout more often than teachers with strong time management behaviors.

Out of 180 elementary teachers, there were 123 teachers who chose to participate in the study. They were given three weeks to fill out a self-report questionnaire that measured their time management behavior, work demands, autonomy, emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment. In order to measure time management for their study, the authors used items from Macan's 33-item Time Management Behavior Scale. The scale they used is presented in **Figure 3**. Each time was scored on a five-point scale that ranged from seldom (1) to very often (5) (Peeters & Rutte, 2005).

Figure 3.*Item Content of the Time Management Scale***Table 1***Item Content of the Time Management Scale*

-
1. Feels in control of time
 2. Reviews activities
 3. Breaks down tasks
 4. Sets short-term goals
 5. Sets deadlines
 6. Increases task efficiency
 7. Sets priorities
 8. Reviews goals
 9. Completes priority tasks
 10. Schedules time daily

From Peeters, M. A., & Rutte, C. G. (2005). Time management behavior as a moderator for the job demand-control interaction. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 10(1), p. 67.

<https://doi.org/10.1037/1076-8998.10.1.64>

The results from the study showed a correlation between each category of time management behavior, work demands, autonomy, emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment. They found that teachers who scored high in time management behaviors experienced less emotional exhaustion and more personal accomplishment compared to teachers who scored low in time management behaviors. Peeters & Rutte (2005) also discovered that whether work demands are high or low, time management makes up for the low autonomy. However, it was found that time management's impact on autonomy was strongest when work demands were high.

Social Support and Mindfulness

Langher et al. (2017) completed a study that explored the impact that perceived support has on reducing burnout among teachers. More specifically, they studied the relationship between perceived support and collaboration with teachers and the three dimensions of burnout:

emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment. Norris & Kaniasty (1996) defined perceived social support as the belief that support from people would be provided when they are needed (p. 498). There were 276 special education teachers who participated in this study. To measure the participants' level of perceived support, the authors used the perceived Collaboration and Support for Inclusive Teaching (CSIT) scale, which includes 12 items that are scored on a five-point scale to evaluate the teachers' perception of support from different sources. To measure burnout, the authors had participants complete the MBI-ES (Langher et al., 2017). The results from the study showed that perceived social support has a negative correlation between emotional exhaustion and depersonalization and a positive association with personal accomplishment. The authors suggested that perceived support can help teachers feel a higher level of acceptance, accomplishment, and participation (Langher et al., 2017, p. 136).

A study completed by Sun et al. (2019) explored the relationship between perceived social support on mindfulness and burnout. More specifically, the authors wanted to determine whether perceived social support has a mediation impact on the relationship between mindfulness and burnout. "Mindfulness describes a state of consciousness arising from intentionally and nonjudgmentally attending to experiences occurring in the current moment" (Sun et al., 2019, p. 1801). They hypothesized that mindfulness would be associated with burnout in special education teachers and that mindfulness would influence burnout through the effect of perceived social support.

The participants in this study consisted of 307 special education teachers. There were three different measurements used in this study. The first was the Five-Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ), which consists of 39 items that measure the five different subscales: observing, describing, acting with awareness, non-judging of inner experience, and nonreactive

to inner experience. The second measure used was the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS), which consists of 12 items that measure three subscales: family, friends, and significant others. The final measure used was the Teacher Burnout Inventory (TBI), which includes a 15-item questionnaire based on the Maslach Burnout Inventory, including emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment (Sun et al., 2019, p. 1802).

The results from the study showed that mindfulness was negatively correlated with burnout, while social support was positively correlated to mindfulness. Results also showed that teachers who reported having high levels of mindfulness tended to perceive more social support from family, friends, and other significant relationships (Sun et al., 2019). These findings demonstrate the beneficial relationship between mindfulness and perceived social support as a way to help reduce burnout. These results also support the idea that a community-based mindfulness training program could help teachers reduce stress and burnout.

Prayer

Chirico et al. (2020) conducted a study on a group of teachers who belonged to a religious institution to see if prayer could be used as a tool to help prevent burnout. Many different types of prayer depend on an individual's beliefs and religious practices. For the purpose of this study, the authors specifically focused on the impacts of personal meditative prayer, which they defined as the “contemplation of spiritual themes and the relationship of the divine with the mankind” (Chirico et al., 2020, p. 3).

The participants in this study consisted of 62 teachers who worked at a Catholic school of a Congregation of nuns. The participants were randomly separated into two groups. One group received a prayer treatment, while the other group was considered the control group. The prayer

treatment group received 16 sessions of training over an eight-week period. During these sessions, they would participate in individualized Christian prayer, as well as focus groups of prayer and reflection. All participants completed a battery of tests before and after the study. The tests measured three different areas. The first was job ratification, which was measured using Warr, Cook, and Wall's Job Satisfaction Scale. The second test used was the MBI, which measured burnout. The third and final test looked at their psychological well-being, which was measured using the General Health Questionnaire (Chirico et al., 2020, pp. 3-4).

The authors found that the group who received the prayer treatment experienced significant improvements across all measures that were observed. Emotional exhaustion levels and psychological impairment dropped significantly, while job satisfaction increased by the end of the eight-week training period. The control group that did not receive the prayer treatment did not see any significant change in any of the measures observed. Participants in the control group demonstrated a slight increase in both emotional exhaustion and depersonalization (Chirico et al., 2020, p. 4).

LaBarbera and Hetzel (2015) conducted a similar study, looking at the use of prayer as a coping strategy for work-related stress. More specifically, the authors "hypothesized that there might be a correlation between Christian teachers' spiritual coping strategies, such as the practice of the spiritual discipline of prayer, and their job satisfaction" (LaBarbera & Hetzel, 2015, pp. 1437-1437). There were 916 teachers who participated in the study. Participants completed a survey that examined their job satisfaction, sources of stress, and practicing prayer as a spiritual discipline.

The authors first looked at the participants' responses when asked about contributing factors of stress. The most reported factor of stress that the participants mentioned was related to

administrative work, including paperwork, grading, and deadlines. The second factor of stress that was mentioned the most among participants was classroom-based, including student behaviors and discipline (Labarbera & Hetzel, 2015, p.1442). In relation to spiritual discipline, 56% of the participants stated that prayer is their most important spiritual discipline. Of those participants, 88.05% of them stated that they regularly practice this discipline. The results of the study showed a statistically significant relationship between the frequency of prayer and loving the ministry of teaching. Participants were more likely to love the ministry of teaching and demonstrated higher levels of job satisfaction when they prayed more frequently (Labarbera & Hetzel, 2015, p. 1444).

CHAPTER III: APPLICATION OF RESEARCH

Strategies to Help with Burnout

Teacher burnout has been identified as a severe occupational issue in education systems across the world. By supporting both students and teachers, special education teachers play a crucial role in the development of inclusive school and classroom practices. Lack of administration support, poor interpersonal relationships, role ambiguity, and heavy workloads are just some of the many factors that lead special education teachers to feel emotionally exhausted, stressed, disengaged, and ultimately burned out. Burnout may develop gradually over time rather than suddenly. For this reason, it is important for special education teachers to spot the warning signs early and take action to avoid burnout.

There are many factors of burnout that are out of a special education teacher's circle of control. For example, it can be challenging to change a school's organizational culture and guarantee participation in a well-established and effective induction program. It can also be difficult to control the amount of paperwork and additional workload demands placed on special education teachers. For this reason, it is important to be aware of strategies to help reduce and prevent burnout that fall within a person's circle of control. Special education teachers who may be experiencing burnout can overcome the situations outside their circle of control by learning how to set up coping strategies that reduce stress and emotional exhaustion. These strategies include exercise, nutrition, time management, social support, and prayer.

Exercise and Nutrition

Special education teachers often experience stressful work environments that can have a significant impact on their overall health. One way teachers can help reduce work-related stress is by participating in a regular exercise program. This will most likely require teachers to find

time outside their working hours to engage in an exercise gym or fitness program. While each teacher may have a unique exercise routine that works best for them, the Mayo Clinic and the Department of Health and Human Services recommend that adults should incorporate at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity activity a week or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity activity a week combined with strengthening activities that work all the major muscle groups (legs, hips, back, abdomen, chest, shoulders, and arms) on at least two days a week (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2018). These components provide adults with a healthy balance of cardiovascular benefits as well as maintaining strong muscles. With that being said, if teachers do not have a history of working out, almost any form of exercise or movement can decrease an individual's stress levels. The most important thing is for the individual to find something they enjoy and will be able to maintain long-term consistency (Locke & Latham, 2002).

In addition to exercise, maintaining a healthy diet plays a role in managing stress that comes from burnout. While the connection between stress and eating habits is evident, each person can experience this connection in different ways. For example, some people become oblivious to their hunger signals under stress and skip meals for extended periods of time. Others become emotional eaters who might mindlessly eat when under stress. These cravings make teachers especially vulnerable to unhealthy eating habits, which in turn inhibit the body from managing stress well. One of the most important aspects of healthy eating is not getting so hung up on "right and wrong" but rather what works and is sustainable for each teacher. Too many people allow unrealistic expectations to create drastic diet changes that last no more than a few weeks. For teachers experiencing the symptoms of burnout, these are three different strategies that can help maintain healthy nutrition during stressful seasons:

- 1) Weekly Meal Preparation - Teacher burnout is almost always accompanied by feelings of “not enough time” and “too much to do.” Not having enough time during the week to prepare somewhat healthy meals can play a large role in unhealthy eating habits. Committing to finding healthy meals that can be prepared in large quantities prior to the work week will allow teachers to still get the nutrients they need during the week without having to use up extra time each night they do not feel like they have. While meal preparation can take some time to get used to, the benefits of preparing before periods of high stress will keep teacher’s bodies working for them rather than against them.
- 2) Stock Up on Healthy Snacks - Symptoms of stress typically cause people to either overeat or skip meals. For either type of person, keeping quick, healthy snacks at work takes the temptations off the table to eat something unhealthy. Experimenting with a variety of nuts, fruits, and salty snacks can provide a safe option for those high-stress moments as a teacher is racing around the school with only one to two minutes at their desk.
- 3) Plan For 80% Healthy Eating - When seeking to maintain or start healthy eating habits, resisting the temptation to think “all or nothing” can help increase the probability of long-term success. While implementing the strategies mentioned above, teachers should allow some comfort food in controlled portions and on specific days. Eating unhealthy for a fraction of the week usually provides better long-term results because being too rigorous on diet changes may set teachers up for failure.

As special education teachers seek to manage stress caused by burnout, physical activity and healthy eating are protective ways to manage stress and maintain a healthy lifestyle. While

both these avenues have proven to work, they do require a long-term commitment by the teacher in order to unlock the full potential of exercise and healthy eating.

Time Management

Special education teachers may feel as though there is not enough time in the day to complete all the things that need to be done. Special education teachers may become overburdened and worn out from the workload of overseeing IEP duties, developing and maintaining systems for each student to collect data, managing paraprofessionals, working with other educators, and planning and implementing individualized instruction for each student. While special education teachers cannot always control the amount of work on their plate, they can establish rhythms and routines that will help improve their time management. Queens and Queens (2013) created some helpful tips that teachers can use to help teachers manage their time better as a tool to help reduce stress and burnout.

Table 1.

Tips to Reduce Stress by Managing Time Better

<p>Reducing Driving Stress</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Give yourself more time to get where you are going (add an extra five minutes for every 20 minutes of expected time, 10 minutes in heavy city traffic). ● Stay focused on driving, and listen to soft music. ● Be patient and keep a good sense of humor. ● Don't use your cell phone.
<p>Working With Difficult Colleagues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Inform them directly without being confrontational that what they are doing is bothering you or taking your time or causing you stress. Be assertive, but not aggressive. ● If the behavior does not improve, ask for a conference with the principal. ● Remember that some people will never change. You may be the one who has to change or leave the area to get the peace you need.
<p>Improving Communication Problems</p>

- Really listen and try to understand the person's viewpoint.
- Avoid "you" statements that can seem to attack.
- Watch your body language.
- Be assertive without being aggressive.
- Learn to say no and mean it.

Some Additional Classroom Time Savers

- Plan at least three weeks in advance.
- Leave later on Friday to get things ready for next week (good investment of time).
- Use the ABC Method and include instructional activities and meeting times.
- Propose in a faculty meeting that walk-throughs be planned for certain days and times.
- Ask for a moratorium on use of the intercom during instructional time.
- Ask for a week's notice for class pull-outs.
- Have a parent volunteer to collect fees or book orders and picture money.
- Seek to get a rule that parents must schedule an appointment in advance.
- Ask for assistance in record keeping.
- Expect and demand that students return from pull-outs as scheduled.
- Use class helpers for filing and doing clerical tasks.
- Stay with your routine; expect other teachers to do the same.
- Seek creative ways to deal with non instructional duties.
- Ask that faculty meetings be limited to one per month.
- Ask for a schoolwide discipline plan.
- Before agreeing to incentive programs, make sure additional help will be provided.
- Use student-led conferences instead of individual teacher conferences.
- Develop a buddy system with one or two teachers to cover class or other situations during a personal emergency or unexpected time robbers.

From Queen, J. A., & Queen, P. S. (2013). *The frazzled teacher's wellness plan: A five-step program for reclaiming time, managing stress, and creating a healthy lifestyle* (2nd ed.). Corwin. pp. 82-83.

Social Support

The research has shown that special education teachers benefit from having a good social support system (Langher et al., 2017; Sun et al., 2019). A strong social network can help increase their ability to handle challenges and cope with difficult situations. Being able to talk openly

about challenging circumstances and receiving verbal support and feedback from others can help teachers overcome the stress and emotional exhaustion they may be feeling in the workplace.

There are opportunities for special education teachers to find the social support they need both inside and outside of the workplace. Teachers can seek out safe spaces to receive support and assistance as needed at work by developing relationships with other educators. Outside the workplace, they can look for support from friends, family, and significant others (Langher et al., 2017). While some individuals may find it easy to find the social support they need, others may experience trouble finding and connecting with others. It is important for special education teachers to make it a priority to find the social support they need throughout the school year in order to help reduce their feelings of stress and burnout. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2023) identified five ways individuals can improve their social connection.

Table 2.

5 Ways to Improve Social Connection

<p>Establish and Maintain Social Connections</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Devote time and attention to develop and maintain relationships. Regular contact with others helps build social connectedness. ● Create a larger and more diverse social network. Having more and different types of people in our lives can potentially provide a greater variety of resources, information, and opportunities to help us with life’s many challenges. ● Join a social group to connect with others. Being part of a group with shared interests, values, or goals can be rewarding and foster a sense of belonging.
<p>Consider the Support You Give, Receive, and Have Available to You</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reach out to sources of support to help you through the tough times, even though it can be hard to ask for help sometimes. Members of your family or community, or health care providers can be sources of support. ● Provide support to others—it can give them much-needed help, and make you feel good too! ● But don’t forget to take care of yourself even if you are caring for others.
<p>Strengthen the Quality of Social Connections</p>

- Focus on building high-quality, strong, meaningful social connections.
- Find ways to be responsive, supportive, and grateful to others.
- Take steps to address conflict or negative feelings when they arise.

Address barriers to social connection

- Take care of your health. Staying healthy allows you to connect with others socially and enjoy those connections.
- Don't let technology distract you from engaging with people. Pay attention to ways it might make you feel worse about yourself or others. Try to use it in ways that are positive.
- Making ends meet and busy work schedules can prevent us from carving out time to connect with others. Consider sharing things you already do (like exercising or having a meal) with a friend—or doing new activities with them.

Talk With a Healthcare Provider About Concerns Like Stress, Loneliness, and Social Isolation

- Talk to your doctor or a health professional if you are feeling isolated or lonely, or if there are major changes or stresses in your life. This can help your health care provider identify potential concerns and ways to help you.
- Life changes like new health issues, divorce, retirement, or the loss of a loved one can lead to disconnection. Being open and honest with your health care provider can help them better understand how to help you.

From Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2023, March 30). *What you can do to improve social connectedness*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

<https://www.cdc.gov/emotional-wellbeing/social-connectedness/ways-to-improve.htm#print>

Prayer

When utilizing prayer as a tool for avoiding burnout, there are many different types of prayer that depend on an individual's beliefs and religious practices. For the purpose of this section, personal meditative prayer, which they defined as the “contemplation of spiritual themes and the relationship of the divine with the mankind” (Chirico et al., 2020, p. 3), will be the sole focus. One of the most important aspects of using prayer as a tool for avoiding burnout includes consistency. A teacher's ability to maintain some form of consistency in prayer during an otherwise inconsistent job remains essential in prayer being an effective practice for stress

management. With that being said, there are a variety of strategies that can help a teacher leverage prayer as an effective tool for handling burnout:

- 1) Utilize Commute Time - Teachers can utilize their commute to and from work as consistent times for prayer. Using this space as a time of prayer can provide consistent time amidst a chaotic and stressful week.
- 2) Short Prayers - Given the busyness of a teacher's schedule, many people struggle with finding the time to pray. Some of this is due to most people's understanding of prayer requiring long periods of time. Learning short five to ten-second prayers can help teachers create moments of spiritual connection even during a busy schedule.
- 3) Religious Community Resource - Utilizing someone in their religious community as a prayer partner can provide multiple benefits for a teacher dealing with burnout. Having someone they can process with who will bring those concerns into prayer allows a teacher to feel seen, heard, and supported.

CHAPTER IV: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Summary of Literature

The study of burnout began in the mid-1970s and focused specifically on individual characteristics. Burnout began to be associated with job variables as studies progressed. Today, both human attributes and the job environment are emphasized when discussing burnout. The Maslach framework is now one of the primary tools used to analyze and measure burnout. This framework is made up of three elements: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment. A person experiences emotional exhaustion when their emotional reserves are depleted, and they experience fatigue. Depersonalization involves distancing oneself from other people and their emotions. Lack of personal accomplishment is the perception of a lack of professional success.

Bethel University's online research database was the main method of gathering material for the literature review. The research topic's keywords were used to search peer-reviewed journals and papers. To provide more recent and current information, articles and publications from the most recent decades were used. Through the online library of Bethel University, all publications and journals were accessible online. Peer-reviewed publications and journals pertinent to the subject were found using other research resources like JSTOR and EBSCO MegaFILE. The literature review began with identifying various causes of special education burnout. The specific causes chosen included Work Environment, Interpersonal Relationships and Workload, Role Ambiguity and Personality Traits, and COVID-19.

Work environment was found to be a predictor of teacher burnout, especially for beginning teachers. Goddard et al. (2006) found that workplaces with poor ratings for their capacity to foster creative teaching were consistently linked to large rises in burnout. Poor work

environments that cannot accommodate innovative work practices show significant decreases in job commitment, role clarity, and overall support.

A special education teacher's workload and interpersonal relationships proved to be a predictor of burnout. The amount of work a teacher experienced, both teaching-related and non-teaching-related, impacted their autonomy and emotional exhaustion. The four specific interpersonal relationships include students, colleagues, supervisors, and parents. Research showed that positive relationships with students were negatively associated with emotional exhaustion and cynical depersonalization and positively associated with personal accomplishment (Van Droogenbroeck et al., 2014, p. 105). Conversely, negative relationships with students can be a predictor to increased levels of emotional exhaustion and cynical depersonalization. Relationships with colleagues had a relation to emotional exhaustion and cynical depersonalization. The same result was found with supervisors. Relationships with supervisors were related to emotional exhaustion and increased autonomy. Parent relationships did not demonstrate any dimensions of burnout (Van Droogenbroeck et al., 2014, p. 106).

The ambiguity in a teacher's role and specific personality traits were seen to also influence teacher stress, which led to burnout. Teachers who perceived high levels of role conflict and role ambiguity showed higher levels of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization while also showing lower levels of personal accomplishment. Teachers with lower levels of certain personality traits, such as extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, openness to experience, and emotional stability, are more likely to experience higher levels of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and lower levels of personal accomplishments.

Finally, the new expectations and requirements placed on teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic led to increased stress and higher rates of burnout. During this time, teachers were

faced with unprecedented circumstances, implementing alternative teaching approaches while facing the stressors of a global pandemic. Studies found that more than 60% of the teachers reported moderate to high levels of anxiety, and 39.83% of teachers reported high anxiety (Shimony et al., 2022, p. 8). The unprecedented circumstances also caused a significant gap in support for teachers. Studies found that the larger the gap between needs and provided support led to a higher level of stress and eventual burnout.

Limitations of Research

The phenomenon known as burnout is an incredibly complex issue that includes particular nuances depending on the context. When researching the topic of burnout, there were many articles, journals, and books that discussed the reasons for burnout. With that being said, there are multiple limitations to research on teacher burnout.

First, the complexity of teacher burnout proved to be a limitation of research. While there are plenty of research articles on possible causes, the unique makeup of variables that come into play for any given teacher provides a high number of possibilities for causes. These variables can fall into the biological makeup of teachers, family life, past experiences or trauma, and even friendships and romantic relationships. All of these factors play a role in the stress a teacher experiences.

Secondly, the fact that a substantial portion of the studies were conducted outside of the United States is a further limitation of the research. In identifying research articles, the investigations begun in Europe were not as helpful, as the educational systems in Europe and America are structured differently. We must do research in the United States if we are to learn more about teacher burnout. Studying teacher burnout in each state would be useful for scholars.

Additionally, there is a lack of knowledge regarding the particular student disabilities that contribute to burnout. We need to determine which disabilities are most likely to cause teacher burnout in order to effectively reduce it. We can concentrate on those disabilities once we have identified those with the highest rates of teacher burnout. Finally, limited research has been conducted on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. While there are some short-term studies completed, additional research will need to be conducted looking at the long-term effects of teacher burnout.

Implications of Future Research

As schools continue to adapt to the ongoing realities of the COVID-19 virus, future research will be required to study the effects that adaptations have on teacher stress and burnout. Some of these adaptations include different learning environments like in-person, hybrid, or online learning. Establishing and maintaining these unique learning environments requires teachers to utilize different skills they may have not been taught prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Additional areas of support will need to be identified, as well as coping strategies that would transcend various forms of economic and educational shutdowns due to future pandemic spikes.

An additional area of future research that would provide additional information on teacher burnout would include focusing on teacher race and whether or not burnout is consistent across race and culture or if teachers of specific races are more susceptible to burnout. Along the same lines, additional research should be conducted to discover if there are coping strategies specific to unique races or if there are coping strategies that transcend race as it relates to accessibility and effectiveness.

Future studies should concentrate on creating reliable evaluation tools for teacher burnout, selecting the most efficient coping strategies, and investigating the variables that influence the adoption of teacher burnout assessments in educational settings. By addressing some of these areas, we can better assist the overall well-being of special education teachers who are dealing with extensive stress and possible burnout.

Professional Application

Special education teachers often find themselves in difficult environments, which can negatively affect their general health and increase the potential for burnout. By developing coping mechanisms that lessen stress and emotional weariness, special education instructors who may be facing burnout can overcome circumstances beyond their control. These strategies include exercise, nutrition, time management, social support, and prayer.

First, participating in a regular fitness routine as well as practicing healthy nutrition habits is one method teachers can use to alleviate stress from their jobs. The most important factor of a regular fitness routine is identifying and sticking to a routine that works for the specific individual. With that being said, a few fundamental requirements of any fitness routine should include both aerobic and strength training activities. These components provide adults with a healthy balance of cardiovascular benefits and maintain strong muscles. In addition, healthy eating habits can help promote physical and mental health for teachers experiencing high levels of stress. Establishing routines like meal preparation, stocking up on healthy snacks at work, and a realistic expectation of healthy eating can all play a role in reducing excess amounts of stress that could lead to burnout.

Secondly, a teacher's time management abilities play an important role in managing stress. When feeling worn out from their workload, special education teachers can establish

rhythms and routines to help improve their time management. Techniques like reducing driving stress to work by allowing extra time for unexpected delays, implementing classroom time savers like planning lessons in advance, or asking for assistance with record keeping are just some of the many ways teachers can implement time-saving routines that help them manage their time more effectively.

Third, research has shown that special education teachers gain from having a strong network of social and emotional support. Their capacity to overcome obstacles and deal with trying circumstances can be improved with a strong social network. Teachers may experience stress and emotional exhaustion at work, but being able to talk openly about difficult situations and getting verbal support and comments from others can help them manage the stress involved.

Finally, personal contemplative prayer—defined by Chirico et al. (2020, p. 3) as "contemplation of spiritual themes and the relationship of the divine with mankind"—was the exclusive subject of this strategy. Consistency is among the most crucial elements of adopting prayer as a method to prevent burnout. In order for prayer to be a useful practice for stress management, a teacher must be able to maintain some consistency in their prayer life despite an otherwise unpredictable career.

Conclusion

The academic school year is filled with a range of difficulties for special education teachers. They are given a lengthy list of responsibilities and demands, some of which include knowing how to create and monitor data collection systems for each student, updating Individualized Education Plans (IEP), keeping track of annual review deadlines for each student, and regularly collaborating and communicating with students, teachers, parents, paraprofessionals, and administrators. These responsibilities play a role in creating an

environment for excessive stress and burnout. The primary causes identified in this research for special education teacher burnout were organizational culture and self-efficacy, interpersonal relationships and workload, role ambiguity and personality traits, and COVID-19. In managing stress levels, coping strategies identified in this research included administration and induction, exercise and nutrition, time management and routine, social support and mindfulness, and prayer. As the special education landscape continues to evolve, teachers will be required to proactively find new coping strategies to manage the extensive and complex list of responsibilities that come with serving special education students.

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