GENDER DIFFERENCES IN ACADEMIC BURNOUT AMONG UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS OF SELECTED UNIVERSITIES IN ABUJA

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ABSTRACT

This study sought to investigate gender differences in academic burnout among undergraduate students at selected universities in Abuja. The study included two hundred participants, eighty-two males and one hundred and twenty-eight females, without regard for ethnic group. This study used the opportunity sampling technique because it was most appropriate for the study. This study used a cross-sectional design in which a standardised test for academic burnout among university students was administered to both male and female students. The researcher scored the Bresó Academic Burnout Questionnaire using the scoring manual for these tests. This study used the t-test to analyse its hypothesis. The results revealed a significant gender difference, with females scoring higher in academic burnout than males. This finding suggests that gender influences academic burnout and plays a role in determining it.

Keywords: Gender, Academic Burnout.

1. Introduction

According to West and Zimmerman (2013), gender is an acquired status that is created by psychological, cultural, and social factors. Gender is an important construct in all communities due to the binary distinction between what is considered masculine and feminine (Gormley, 2015). Gender also refers to how men and women are assigned roles and responsibilities in families, societies, and civilisations. March and Smyth (2003) define gender as beliefs about the traits, skills, and propensities of both men and women (femininity and masculinity). Furthermore, gender may be viewed as something so deeply ingrained in our institutions, behaviours, beliefs, and desires that it appears entirely natural to us (Eckert *et al*., 2013). According to Kangas *et al*. (2014), gender is a set of socially constructed ideologies and conventions that influence how men and women behave and act.

Burnout

The term 'burnout' refers to the exhaustion and fatigue caused by hard labour. Numerous studies consider burnout to be a feeling of emotional exhaustion caused by long-term stress conditions

such as pressure, deadlines, and insufficient resources to complete assigned duties and responsibilities (Admin *et al*., 2023). Burnout is typically caused by the accumulation of daily stresses rather than one or two major life events (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Burnout symptoms include emotional exhaustion and a decline in individual functioning (Andrade, Ribeiro, & Máté, 2023). Several studies on burnout have been conducted on professionals known to experience occupational burnout, such as salespeople (Sand & Miyazaki, 2000), teachers (Andrade, Ribeiro, & Máté, 2023), and nurses (BankoleAdeyemi, 2019). However, the term "burnout" is used to describe academic burnout in scenarios and settings related to education (Barbayannis, Bandari, Zheng, Baquerizo, Pecor, & Ming, 2022).

Dubbelt, Rispens, and Demerouti (2016) investigated the prevalence of burnout among B.A. students, counsellors, and nurses. They concluded that this problem is common among students as well. According to Edú-valsania, Laguía, and Moriano (2022), students should be treated as employees due to their exposure to paperwork and risk of burnout. Many stressors are linked to academic burnout (Daykin *et al*., 2018), such as working long hours while attending school, worrying about grades, uncertainty about the future, a lack of control, dissatisfaction because of the gap between one's personal and professional lives, and a lack of support from friends and peers. Numerous adverse consequences, such as high-risk behaviours like absenteeism and job desertion in the past, have been connected to burnout. The same findings hold for burnout among academics (Daud *et al.,* 2020). Students might experience academic burnout in a variety of ways. It causes a wide range of physical problems, including cardiovascular disease, metabolic syndrome, sleep disturbances, changes in appetite, fatigue, weakened immunity, headaches, and gastrointestinal distress, as well as increased rates of mood disorders like depression and anxiety. These physical problems also reduce productivity and student satisfaction in the classroom (Costa *et al*., 2012). According to the same study, students' health suffers greatly as their level of burnout increases, and their ability to learn and perform worsens as well. Erschens *et al*. (2019) state that the following factors make student academic burnout a crucial area of study for universities. First, academic burnout may play a significant role in how others perceive various student behaviours, such as academic function during a study session. Students' relationships with their instructors and higher education institutions are also impacted by academic burnout. For example, academic burnout affects students' commitment to the faculty and their post-graduation engagement with scientific issues. Students' motivation and enthusiasm for learning may be impacted by academic burnout. A study also found that students' academic performance was negatively impacted by burnout (Hair *et al*., 2017). Higher burnout levels were associated with lower self-perception as students tended to develop their skills, according to a study by Hair *et al*. (2017) that involved 274 students (average age = 20.61). There was only one burnout factor that was connected to one's view of skill development. There have been conflicting findings in the literature regarding the relationship between gender and academic burnout, depending on the strength and direction of this link (Ibrahim *et al*., 2017). The idea that women are more likely than men to experience burnout is contested by a meta-analysis of the gender and burnout relationship using effect estimates from 183 studies (Ibrahim *et al*., 2017).

Many resources address burnout in professional settings, but a study of this phenomenon among students merits significant attention, particularly regarding gender. More study is needed on academic burnout and how it relates to gender. Because it causes high levels of anxiety, depression, frustration, hostility, and fear in students, academic burnout has become a serious problem among undergraduates (Indreswari, Probowati, &Rachmawati, 2022). It has an equal impact on students' academic performance, attendance in class, and interactions with staff and faculty (Jagodics & Szabó, 2022). Peer pressure and low socioeconomic status are two factors that have been extensively researched about academic burnout, but little research has been done on the relationship between academic burnout and gender. Therefore, by investigating gender disparities in academic burnout among undergraduate students at particular private universities, the current study seeks to advance research on burnout.

2. Research Method

2.1 Participants

The population for this study is made up of undergraduate students from various departments at the selected universities in Abuja. This study included two hundred participants, eighty-two males and one hundred and twenty-eight females, without regard for ethnicity.

2.2 Sampling Techniques

This study adopted the opportunity sampling technique because it was the best fit for the study. As the name implies, this method of sampling involves choosing anyone available and willing to participate in the study. The opportunity technique is used to select willing participants from a target group to participate in a study.

2.3 Instruments

This researcher's deployed questionnaires are instruments for the research. Questionnaires are one of the relevant research instruments for collecting and analysing data for this study. More specifically, the Breso Academic Burnout Questionnaire was used. This questionnaire was developed by Bresó*et al*. (1997). It assesses three types of academic burnout: exhaustion, disinterest, and inefficiency. The questionnaire consists of fifteen items graded on the Likert scale, with five degrees ranging from 'completely disagree' to 'completely agree'. Reliability as calculated by the questionnaire's developers was 0.70, 0.82, and 0.75 for the three domains of academic burnout (Breso, Salanova, & Schaufeli, 2007). Na'ami (2010), in an Iranian study, has reported its reliability as 0.79, 0.82, and 0.75, respectively. Na'ami (2009), in an Iranian study, reported a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.86.

2.4 Procedure

This study was carried out in some selected private universities in Abuja. The data collection process lasted for one day in each school. Participants were recruited from the school environment, including the canteen, classrooms, and lounges. The participants were given an academic burnout inventory to complete. The inventory was turned over to the researcher once it had been completed. This procedure was used in all of the private universities chosen for the study.

2.5 Research Design

This study used a cross-sectional design in which a standardised test to assess academic burnout among university students was administered to both male and female students.

2.6 Data Analysis

The researcher scored the Bresó Academic Burnout Questionnaire according to the scoring manual for these tests. This study used the t-test to investigate the first and second hypotheses.

3. Result

3.1 Presentation of Results

This study aimed to investigate the following hypotheses: there will be a significant difference between gender and burnout, and there will be a significant difference in age and academic burnout among undergraduates of selected universities in Abuja. After the data collection, the study employed a t-test analysis to test hypothesis one. The result found a significant gender difference, with females scoring higher (M=1.4968, SD=3.05796) than men (M=1.3583, SD = 24.89292), t(198), 5.522, p<.001. The table below explains the mean and standard deviation of the result.

Table 1: The mean and standard deviation of hypothesis 1.

Variables	Mean	SD	*t*	*p*
Males	1.3583	24.89292	5.522	.001
Females	1.4968	3.05796		

4.1 Discussion

This study hypothesised that burnout and gender would differ significantly. After the data collection, the study employed a t-test analysis to test hypothesis one. The results revealed a significant gender difference in academic burnout levels, with females scoring higher than men. This finding suggests that female students were more likely than male students to experience burnout, which can lead to exhaustion and cognitive and emotional decline. This finding is consistent with previously mentioned studies that focused on high school students (IsHak, Nikravesh, Lederer, and Perry, 2013) and in some cases, university students. Furthermore, the majority of research on worker burnout (Kaggwa *et al*., 2021; Lin & Huang, 2014; Kim *et al*., 2018) consistently shows that women are at a higher risk than men, particularly when the tiredness dimension is considered, demonstrating the rigid relationship.

Furthermore, previous research has shown that women are at a higher risk of emotional impairment, which causes difficulties in controlling negative emotions (such as impatience and reactivity) (Koutsimani, Montgomery, &Georganta, 2019). Additional research hypothesises that

these differences are linked to the socialisation hypothesis, which holds that traditional socialisation patterns (such as the expectation that women will play more expressive emotional roles than men) may influence how people react to stress (Madigan & Curran, 2021; Mahfouz *et al*., 2020; Okojie *et al*., 2023).

Furthermore, studies by Rehman, Bhuttah, and You (2020) show that females enrolled in academic track schools have higher rates of school burnout, regardless of academic performance. The rate of school burnout among high school girls has increased by 30% in the last two years, particularly in Finland (Portoghese *et al*., 2018). Since girls are more likely than boys to succeed academically, receive higher grades, attend higher tracks more frequently, and exhibit reportedly higher levels of discipline and engagement, the high rate of school burnout among girls is also a significant practical concern for educational systems outside of Finland (Shin & Park, 2022).

Girls are more likely to worry about their performance and academic failure because they are under more pressure to perform well in school (Tang, Tang, & Gross, 2019). Because of this, girls may exhibit burnout symptoms more frequently than boys.

Research has also shown that hormones can explain the behavioural differences between males and females (Tee *et al*., 2022; Tran, Vo, & Ho, 2023; Vinter, Aus, & Arro, 2021). Hormones are chemical compounds that are released by glands all over the body and transported via the blood. Men and women both produce the same sex hormones, but their levels and how they affect the body's various systems vary (Wang *et al*., 2024). The sex hormone testosterone, which is more prevalent in men than in women, has an impact on behaviour and development both before and after birth. At 7 weeks, the development of male sex organs is triggered by the production of testosterone, which also acts on the central nervous system to make the brain more masculine. Testosterone is frequently blamed for male traits like aggression, competitiveness, visual-spatial skills, increased sexual drive, etc. Males are substantially larger than females in this sexually dimorphic nucleus, which is located in the hypothalamus close to the base of the brain.

4.2 Conclusion

By determining whether gender and academic burnout are significantly correlated, this study looked into how gender may act as a moderating factor for undergraduates' academic stress. The findings showed a significant correlation between women's higher academic burnout scores and men's lower scores. This finding suggests that, in comparison to men, women are more likely to experience academic burnout.

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