

## **Associating Leadership' Burnout and their Coping Humour in Pakistani Universities**

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### **Abstract**

*The present descriptive study examines the associations between leaders' burnout and coping humour in Pakistani universities. Population consisted of all Deans, Directors and Heads from universities located in Lahore. Purposively 142 Deans, Directors and Heads from Lahore College for Women University and University of Punjab were selected to collect data. The sample consisted of professors, associate professors and assistant professors. Three different tools, Individual Background Questionnaire, The Coping Humour Scale and the Maslach Burnout Inventory- Educators Survey (MBI-ES) were used to collect information about research variables. Correlation analysis and simple descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data. Results of correlations analysis showed that all variables were associated with the three sub scales of MBI-ES i.e. emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and personal accomplishment. It was reported that there is a strong negative relationship between both variables. Leaders with high humour had relatively low level of burnout. More specifically Emotional exhaustion and depersonalization were negatively related to both affiliate and self-enhancing humor. The study highlights the importance of humour in coping with stress and wellbeing in the academia.*

**Keywords:** Coping Humour, Burnout, Stress

### **Introduction**

Sense of humor plays a very vital role to lower the level of depression and in the improvement of the quality of life. According to Girma, (2016) sense of humor is useful to decrease the level of psychological problems of a person e.g. depression, anxiety and stress, as well as provide relaxing mood, power to defeat illness, and life satisfaction. The Researchers take initiative to explore the possibility that sense of humor may have distinguished contributions in the effectiveness of workplace or not. Previous studies have been proved the importance of sense of humor and depict the association between sense of humor and workplace effectiveness such as; employees'

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creativity, social interactions, employee bonding, compatibility and enthusiasm (Cann, Cann, & Jordan, 2016).

Much research has been conducted on levels of teacher burnout and its reasons, but less attention is paid to teachers' coping strategies. It is admitted that leaders may not be able to show the level of efficiency and effectiveness for themselves as they can offer for their subordinates (Berkovich & Eyal, 2017). Burnout, a significant measure of physical exhaustion and mental distress is catalyzed by work-related and professional stress. It is known fact that depression, fatigued state of emotions low achievement level of leaders, decreases leaders effectiveness. Teaching profession is the most depressing and stressful profession in the world (Amjed & Tirmzi, 2016). Based on complexity of their work including teachers have to perform in different dimensions like teaching to students, working with administration, designing assessment, meeting parents expectations so it is obvious they become the victims of "burnout".

To investigate teacher burnout is important as it affects not only teachers but learners and overall quality of education too. Cooper, Kong, and Crossley (2017) discussed sources of teachers' burnout under two categories as environmental factors (i.e. societal/organizational) and personality factors, although it is not limited to these factors. Reasons or sources whatsoever, their coping strategies are varied from individual to individual as these appeared to be a function of the personal characteristics/capabilities, quality of interpersonal relationships, and school environment. Burnout itself is important but the most important is how to cope with it (Kim, Lee, & Wong, 2016). The present study was designed to identify and define relationship between academic heads' burnout level and their coping humour.

### *Objective*

The sole objective of the study was to correlate academic heads burnout level with their coping humor.

### *Research Questions*

1. What is the burnout level of Academic Heads?
2. Have academic heads a significant level of coping humour?
3. Is gender differences exist between heads burnout level and coping humor?
4. Is there any relationship between burnout level and coping humour?

### **Literature Review**

Accountability has been recognized as a major reason of this difference among leaders' work stress in different contexts (Ma Prieto, & Pilar, 2014). General use of positive self-regulation strategies is another factor that may be the cause of this huge difference in results. Madrid, Patterson, Birdi, Leiva, and Kausel, (2014) lesser levels of burnout symptoms and work stress among academic leaders is the result of pervasive use of proactive self-regulation strategies. The results of this study depicts that there was a correlation between use of strategy and low levels of work stress. This buffering

effect produced by the use of pre-emptive self-regulation approaches does not proven highly effective on cynicism. This result is as similar to the results of previous research. Nijenhuis, (2015) illustrates that use of proactive self-regulation strategies lower the levels of burnout symptoms among teachers, while puts very low effect on cynicism. In the previous studies, researchers argue that the constant modification of one's own behaviour does not proven effective for reducing cynicism among teachers. The results of this study depicts that this may be true for principals also. The success and failure of a school's development is highly dependent on the well-being of the principals and teachers involved in the school leadership duties. Pundt and Herrmann, (2015) said that the well-being of teachers and principals may face challenges by any change in a school. Therefore, it is needed to investigate the well-being of those principals and teachers who take effective part in the school leadership responsibilities, for the school development and improvement.

Humor with positive style creates the relaxing and cherish environment at the workplace rather than creating stressful and passive environment. It is helpful to build strong relationship among peers and also helpful to reduce the communication gap among each other. In the opinion of (Jones & Bear, 2018), it is the ability to develop social interactions in stressful circumstances. In the previous studies, many researchers tried to unfold and describe the concepts of "humor" and "having sense of humour". However, after great efforts a researcher provides the complex humour construct with the abundance of complications (Kliuchnikova, Samokhina, Ilina, Karpov, Pyatnitskiy, Kuznetsova, & Archakov, 2016)). A review of literature on humour has shown that there are at least four distinguished factors that help in defining and deeply understanding the concept of humour:

1. both terms "humor" and "sense of humor" are often conversely used;
2. humor has diverse multiple dimensions
3. humor is appraised in different ways; and
4. There is large number of humor styles, some styles are positive while some styles are negative.
5. Employees' health, performance, job satisfaction and withdrawal, etc.
6. perceived leaders' performance, follower approval, etc. and
7. Lower the chances of harmful effects of workplace stress on the employees' health.

Leaders' sense of humour has great effects on his employees' performance as employees' own humour affects his own performance. According to Pundt and Venz, (2017) humour by leaders has been shown to mitigate the withdrawal behaviours from employee, Yam, Christian, Wei, Liao, and Nai, (2017) said that leaders' humour increase the job satisfaction and commitment among employee. Leaders' sense of humour is essentially required at the workplace because it is involved in raising the inspirational level of employee towards work. It may also provide satisfaction to the

employee. Humour by leaders is responsible for the raise in individual and team performance and has important implications for subordinate satisfaction with supervisors (Zeynep, 2014). Some studies suggests that the leaders who are using their sense of humour effectively are seems as much popular and trustworthy among their circle and they know how to create positive environment for work in surroundings. Leaders using humour become more popular among the source, Meyer, (1997) suggests a shared set of personal values and according to (Amjed & Tirmzi, 2016) increases trust in the source.

The well-being of those principals and teachers who take effective part in the school leadership plays an important role in the development of school, well-being of other staff and learning performance of students as said by the researchers in past (Cooper, Kong, & Crossley, 2017). Ma Prieto, and Pilar, (2014) illustrates in their studies that the chances of burnout for principals may increases if they consistently suffer from high levels of work stress. There are number of aspects of the school context contributing to increase the chances of stress and burnout among principals and teachers. According to Christian, Wei, Liao, and Nai, (2017) the professional well-being of those (e.g. teachers and principals) working in school leadership may face challenges by the reforms and development occurred in school. Most of the researchers spent their time to find out some effective strategies for principals to reduce their work stress such as the research on principals' ways of coping with work stressors has major focus on reactive strategies of coping stress and their effectiveness (Berkovich & Eyal, 2017). However, some strategies are known as proactive self-regulation strategies which means to decrease the level of work stress by putting effort into changing the work environment (Amjed & Tirmzi, 2016), and these strategies are used by the principals, teachers and others contributing to school leadership.

### **Methodology**

The present study was descriptive and Quantitative in nature. Population consisted of all academic heads from universities located in Lahore. Purposively heads from Lahore College for Women University and university of the Punjab were selected to collect data. There are total 100 faculty members on different administrative positions in university of the Punjab and 42 in Lahore College for Women University. The sample consisted of professors, associate professors and assistant professors. They are dean, directors, head of departments, principle of centres and in-charges. Among them 83 were male and 59 were female. Three different tools, Individual Background Questionnaire, The Coping Humour Scale and the Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educators Survey (MBI-ES) were adopted to collect information about research variables. Data collection was time consuming due to work engagement of heads.

### **Data Analysis**

Correlation analysis and simple descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data.

**Table 1**

*Frequency and percentage of burnout level of academic leaders*

Subscale	Degree of Usage	Frequency	Percent
EE	High	19	13
	Moderate	51	36
	Low	72	51
DP	High	12	09
	Moderate	38	27
	Low	92	65
PA	High	22	15
	Moderate	53	37
	Low	67	47

Table 1 showed that on all the three subscales of burnout inventory, percentage burnout of academic leadership was found to be low. As 51 % academic leaders reported low degree of usage for emotional exhaustion, 65% academic leaders reported low degree of usage for depersonalization and 47% reported low degree of usage for personal accomplishment.

The Coping Humour Scale (CHS) was used to determine the use and degree to which academic heads use humour as a coping mechanism when faced with stressful situations. It was developed by Martin and Lefcourt in (1983). The scores ranged from 09 to 27 with a mean score of 19.99 and a standard deviation of 3.23. A median split was calculated to determine categories in which academic leaders were divided into high vs low humour usage. The same procedure was used earlier by Talbot for her doctorate project in 1996.

**Table 2**

*Frequency and percentage of humour usage of academic leaders*

Scale	Degree of Usage	Frequency	Percent
CHS	High	65	46
	Low	77	54
	Total	142	100

Table 2 showed that 54% academic leaders use low degree of humour. It can be concluded that majority of academic leaders use other coping strategies for their stress than humour.

**Table 3**

*Gender differences in the mean score of major dimension of research variables*

Dimensions	Males		Females		t(142)	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
A-humor	4.50	1.15	4.54	1.10	0.25	0.80
S-humor	4.35	1.19	4.68	1.01	2.94	0.003
E-Exhaustion	3.00	1.11	2.50	1.15	-3.20	0.002
D-personalization	1.40	1.20	1.44	1.12	0.35	0.720
P-accomplishment	4.00	1.00	4.39	0.90	3.21	0.001

Gender differences were revealed by data analysis among three core components of heads ‘burnout, emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and personal accomplishment and affiliative and self-enhancing humor. Female’s score was higher on both scales of coping humor and two scales of burnout inventory than male. Only on emotional exhaustion scale of burnout male scored higher.

**Table 4**

*Correlations among different dimensions of humour and burnout*

Sr no	variables	1	2	3	4	5
1	Affiliative humour	-0.4	-			
2	Self-enhancing humour	-0.7	0.36**	-		
3	Emotional exhaustion	0.48**	-0.11*	-0.27**	-	
4	Depersonalization	0.24**	-0.12*	-0.20**	0.47**	-
5	Personal accomplishment	-0.21**	-0.27*	0.27**	-0.26**	-0.30**

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$

Correlations among three core components of heads ‘burnout , emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and personal accomplishment and affiliative and self-enhancing humor was calculated .The three dimensions of burnout were significantly related to affiliative and self-enhancing humor. More specifically, EE and depersonalization were negatively related to both affiliative and self-enhancing humor.

## **Discussion**

The study was conducted to explore the burnout level of academic leaders and their use of humour as coping strategy, and the associations between these two variables. The results of this study has been shown that majority of academic leaders experienced low levels of work stress and burnout and exhibited low level of humour use as coping strategy. In comparison with previous studies, this study showed quite positive results as the previous studies has also shown that most of the academic leaders experience high pressures and stress due to work overload and too many responsibilities. The findings of this study match with Zeynep (2014) who says that humour might have a positive role making work more enjoyable and undermine power

and status. Organizations need a proactive approach having self-enhancing humour criterion for leaders' selection.

According to Cann, Cann, and Jordan, (2016) humour by leaders has been shown to mitigate the withdrawal behaviours from employee but this finding does not match with the findings of present study as it concludes that majority of leaders did not use humour as a burnout strategy. Contrary to the results of this study Zeynep (2014), said that leaders' humour increase the job satisfaction and commitment among employee. Leaders' sense of humour is essentially required at the workplace because it is involved in raising the inspirational level of employee towards work. Humour by leaders is responsible for the raise in individual and team performance and has important implications for subordinate satisfaction with supervisors (Amjed & Tirmzi, 2016). His findings are in accordance with this study that the leaders who are using their sense of humour effectively are seems as much popular and trustworthy among their circle and they know how to create positive environment for work in surroundings. Many researchers tried to unfold and describe the concepts of "humour" and "having sense of humour" such as Jones and Bear, (2018) provide the complex humour construct with the abundance of complications and results of their study strengthen the results of present study.

The results of Cooper, Kong, and Crossley, (2017) also strengthen the findings of present study as he identified the relationship between burnout and academic leaders' coping humour and he found out majority of the respondents are experiencing more burnout and emotional vulnerability. The findings of present study are contrary to the findings of Kim, Lee, and Wong, (2016) who says that humor and optimism had a significant main effect on burnout. The interactions between perceived stress humor, optimism, and pessimism did not predict burnout and this result also strengthen the findings of this study.

## **Conclusion**

Majority of academic heads had low level of burnout. The degree of burnout among academic heads/leaders was low for all the components of burnout. i.e emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and personal accomplishment. Majority of academic heads did not use humor as coping strategy. Burnout of academic heads was found to be significantly correlated with their use of humor.

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