



Perception of professional social support as a predictor of burnout level of pre-school teachers**

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Abstract

The main purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between perception of pre-school teachers' professional social support and burnout levels. The model of this research is the relational screening model included in the quantitative research model. The participants of the study were 297 pre-school teachers working in official schools of the Ministry of National Education in Tekirdag in 2017-2018 academic year. The data were collected by burnout scale, teacher professional social support scale and participant information form. According to the data, there was a statistically significant negative correlation between burnout and all sub-dimensions of social support scale. In addition, professional social support perceptions of preschool teachers were found to be a significant predictor of burnout levels.

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Keywords: Burnout, professional social support, pre-school teacher

1. Introduction

Children make up both the foundation and the future of societies. A good-quality education contributes considerably to the economic development of countries. The fact that education of children starts with pre-school teaching stresses the importance of the responsibility assumed by pre-school teachers (Akkurt, 2008). In the pre-schooling period, children can enrich their knowledge base with new information and acquire novel skills in educational settings where they are sure that they feel liked, accepted and safe (MEB, 2013). At this juncture, the significance of qualifications of pre-school teachers comes to the forefront as a crucial matter that needs to be considered once again.

Teaching is a profession based on interpersonal relationships. Teachers are in a constant communication with students, parents/legal guardians of students, school principals and co-workers. Burnout can emerge as a serious problem in teaching, a profession which is replete with demanding interpersonal relationships (Cemaloğlu &

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** This study was adapted from the thesis study conducted under the supervision of the second author and presented at the 5th International Conference On Lifelong Education And Leadership For All

Şahin, 2007; Ertürk & Keçecioglu, 2012; Girgin, 2010). Besides, making efforts to teach individuals turns to be a stressful occupation (Kyriacou 2001) and as a consequence, it is likely for the teacher to reach the point of burnout. Preschool teaching is a profession that requires a lot of labor both physically and emotionally. Teachers work in very difficult conditions, stressful conditions such as long-term and negative parent approaches (Hale-Jinks & Konopf, 2006).

Burnout in professional life is defined as dissociation from work, decline in professional competency, feeling of physical, emotional and mental fatigue and exhaustion and experience of chronic stress (Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter, 2001). Another definition in the literature is by Pines and Aronson. As per Pines and Aronson, burnout pertains to the loss of motivation, energy, idealism, perspective and purpose and is a case of physical, emotional and mental exhaustion which gives rise to feelings of chronic stress, despair, helplessness and entrapment (Pines & Aronson, 1988).

On account of the heaviness of stress and the incompetence to cope with this heavy stress, the person can suffer burnout in terms of the loyalty to the organization which he/she is a part of and the willingness to work for this organization. Inasmuch as burnout is likely to pave the way for unpleasant incidents for both the organization and the person, it is described as a case calling for precautions to be take. At this juncture, studies which emphasize the concept of social support so as to overcome unfavorable situations arising from stress and to combat against these challenges capture the attention (Cohen & Wills, 1985).

Perceived social support is defined as the relationship established by the individual through trustworthy relations with persons existing in his/her external world, the cognitive perception by the person of the support to be received when needed and the belief that sincere communication links are established by the person (Oktan, 2005). The judgment by the individual as to whether functions of the social support received by the individual are sufficient for the individual is called as the conceived perception of social support (Procidano & Heller, 1983). In this respect, considering that individual's perception of the external world affects his/her behaviors (Senemoğlu, 2004), it can be asserted that the perception of social support will also differ from person to person. Social support offered to the individual enables him/her to feel better and to alleviate the impact of unfavorable situations accordingly, to combat against challenges and problems and also makes a positive impact on individual's life (Baltaş ve Baltaş, 1997; Robbins & Judge, 2009; Mahon et al., 1998).

Zimet et al. (1988) address the sources of social support as the family, friends and significant others in daily life, and as co-workers and supervisors in professional life. As for Bakker, Demerouti and Verbeke (2004), sources of social support at organizational level are the wage, career opportunities and job security. In terms of social relations,

sources of social support can be specified as the support extended by subordinates and superiors and the organizational climate.

So as to solve effectively the burnout problem peculiar to the teaching profession, it will be beneficial to understand variables relevant to this circumstance. Pre-school teachers are the first teachers of children who just launch their schooling lives. It is important that, as the first teachers and role models encountered by children, pre-school teachers have mental health, be dedicated to teaching profession, be able to offer a trustworthy environment to children and be capable of approaching children sympathetically by descending to their educational development levels. It can be argued that pre-school teacher having burnout syndrome as a result of his/her negative experiences is likely to be have difficulties in fulfilling requirements of his/her profession. Departing from all these concerns, this study aimed to analyze the relationship between pre-school teachers' perception of the professional social support and their burnout levels. In the context of this purpose, answers to below questions were sought after:

1. What is the burnout level of pre-school teachers?
2. What is the level of pre-school teachers' perception of professional social support?
3. Is there a statistically significant relationship between the burnout level of pre-school teachers and their perception of the professional social support?
4. Is pre-school teachers' perception of the professional social support a predictor of their burnout level?

2. Method

In this part, detailed information was presented on the research model, population and sample selection, measurement tools used in the data collection process and the analysis of data.

2.1. Research Design

This quantitative research is a descriptive study where correlational research design is utilized to identify as to what extent the level of pre-school teachers' perception of the professional social support is a predictor of their burnout levels. Describing the current situation of two or more variables as they are supposed to be, correlational research design is a research model which indicates how these variables change together and endeavors to demonstrate the magnitude of this change (Karasar, 2008; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

2.2. Population and Sampling

Research population is composed of a total of 527 pre-school teachers working in the provincial center of Tekirdağ, Turkey, in 2018. Research sample was selected from this population. Sample is comprised of a total of 297 pre-school teachers who worked in the academic year of 2017-2018 and were selected through simple random sampling method.

In the sample selection, sample size calculation table prepared by Yazıcıoğlu and Erdoğan (2004) was utilized. In this respect, with a margin of error of 0.05 ($p = 0.05$ and $q=0.5$), it was deduced that the participation by minimum 254 pre-school teachers ($n=254$) was sufficient for the sampling. Table 3.2.1 displayed the demographics of the research sample.

Table 1. Demographics of the research participants

Variable	F	%	
Age	21-30 year	158	3.1
	31-40 year	84	82
	41 years and over	55	8.7
	Total	297	00
Educational status	Associate's Degree	93	0
	Bachelor's Degree	190	5.6
	Master's Degree	14	.4
	Total	297	00.0
Years of experience	1-10 year	185	2.2
	11-20 year	82	7.6
	21 years and over	30	0.2
	Total	297	00.0
Type of institution	Independent kindergarten	100	3.6
	Kindergarten	197	6.4
	Total	297	00
Total	297	00	

It is discerned that most participants were aged 21-30 years (53.1%) and had 1-10 years of experience (62.2%). Furthermore, it can be reported that number of holders of bachelor's degree (65.6%) and teachers of independent kindergarten (66.4%) was higher than other participant categories.

2.3. Data Collection Tools

In the research, Burnout Measure was employed to measure the burnout level of pre-school teachers whereas teacher professional social support scale was used to measure the professional social support level of pre-school teachers. Data on the demographics of participants were collected through participant information forms prepared by the researcher.

Burnout measure developed by Pines and Aronson (1988) and using a seven-point Likert scale was composed of a total of 22 items. Measure items are scored from "1 never" to "7 every time". Validity and reliability of the measure was checked by Çapri (2006) who also prepared the Turkish format of the measure. In the study by Çapri (2006),

Cronbach's Alfa coefficient was found as 0.93 for the measure in its entirety. In this study, Cronbach's Alfa coefficient was calculated as 0.88 for the entire measure.

Teacher professional social support scale was developed by Kaner (2007) in order to measure teachers' perception of the professional support which they received during work at the school. Teacher professional social support scale contains 44 items and is composed of five sub-scales. Sub-scales of teacher professional social support scale are (a) support of the school principal, (b) support of co-workers, (c) family support, (d) student support and (e) effective educational support. Items of teacher professional social support scale are scored through a 5-point Likert-type scale (from 'Very Untrue - 1 point' to 'Very True - 5 points'). Reliability of the scale was checked through Cronbach's Alfa coefficient, a measure of internal consistency. This coefficient was 0.95 for the entire scale whereas it ranged from 0.69 to 0.95 for sub-scales. In terms of this study, Cronbach's Alfa coefficient was ascertained as 0.955 for the entire scale, and ranged from 0.71 to 0.89 for sub-scales.

2.4. Data Analysis

Research data were analyzed through the software called Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). In terms of data analysis, whether there was any error in data was first examined. Later, whether data were normally distributed was checked through kurtosis and skewness values. As kurtosis and skewness values range between +1 and -1 it is deduced that data are normally distributed (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). For the entire scale and each sub-scale, kurtosis ranges between 0.776 and -0.963 whereas skewness ranges between 0.776 and -0.963. Therefore, it was accepted that data were normally distributed and the application of parametric tests was opted. The relationship between the burnout measure and sub-scales of teacher professional social support scale was examined through correlation analysis. Regression analysis was utilized for identifying the power of views of pre-school teachers on professional social support for predicting the burnout level.

3. Results

Table 2 showed the mean and standard deviation values for burnout levels of pre-school teachers.

Table 2. Mean and standard deviation values for burnout levels of pre-school teachers

	N	\bar{X}	Sd	Min.	Maks.
Burnot	297	2,28	,827	1,0	4,38

The review of Table 2 demonstrates that the mean and standard deviation of scores obtained from the burnout measure by pre-school teachers are successively 2.28 and 0.827 whereas minimum and maximum scores obtained from views expressed by pre-

school teachers are 1 and 4.38 consecutively. Table 4.3 exhibits the findings on mean and standard deviation of scores obtained through the assessment of pre-school teachers' perception of professional social support.

Table 4.3 Mean and standard deviation of scores obtained through the assessment of pre-school teachers' perception of professional social support

Boyut	N	X̄	Sd	Min.	Maks.
Support of the school principal	297	3,67	,867	1,37	5,00
Support of co-workers'	297	3,82	,837	1,38	5,00
Family support	297	3,34	,894	1,25	5,00
Student support	297	4,43	,734	2,67	5,00
Effective educational support	297	3,39	,758	1,20	5,00
Professional social support	297	3,70	,662	2,11	5,00

The review of Table 4.3 indicates that the overall mean and standard deviation of scores obtained by pre-school teachers from the entire set of sub-scales of teacher professional social support scale are successively 3.67 and 0.867 whereas minimum and maximum scores obtained from views expressed by pre-school teachers are 1.37 and 5 consecutively. The mean of scores obtained from the sub-scale 'support of co-workers', sub-scale 'family support', sub-scale 'student support', sub-scale 'effective educational support' are successively 3.82, 3.34, 4.43 and 3.39. It can be suggested that the highest scores are obtained from views expressed on the sub-scale 'student support' whereas the lowest scores are obtained from views expressed on the sub-scale 'effective educational support'. Table 4.4 displayed the correlation analysis on the relationship between the burnout level and the level of perceived professional social support.

Table 4.4 Relationship between the burnout level and the level of perceived professional social support

		Support of the school principal	Support of co-workers'	Family support	Student support	Effective educational support	Professional social support
Burnout	r	-,394*	-,344*	-,315*	-,381*	-,219*	-,373*
	p	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000

Table 4.4 showed that there was a statistically significant, moderately negative correlation between the burnout and professional social support ($r=-.373$; $p<.05$). It can be asserted that the strongest negative correlation of the burnout was with the sub-scale 'support of the school principal' whereas its weakest negative correlation was with the sub-scale 'effective educational support'. Table 4.5 demonstrates the results of regression

analysis of the effect of pre-school teachers' perception of professional social support on the burnout level.

Table 4.5 Results of regression analysis of the effect of the perception of professional social support on the burnout level

Independent Variable	B	S. Error	β	t	p	R ²	F
Constant	4,711	,241		19,511	,000	,158	55,262
Professional Social Support	-,095	,013	-.0397	-7,434	,000		

In Table 4.5, according to results of simple linear regression analysis, it was ascertained that the perception of professional social support by pre-school teachers who participate in the study was a significant predictor of their burnout levels ($F=55.262$; $p=0.00$; $R^2=.158$). The perception of professional social support explains 16% of the change in burnout level.

4. Discussion, Conclusions and Recommendations

This study analyzed the relationship between pre-school teachers' perception of professional social support and their burnout levels. According to the first finding of the research, pre-school teachers received support in descending order from their students, co-workers, school principals, educational atmosphere and lastly from their families. The result of the research performed by Taşdan and Yalçın (2010) is analogous to this finding. It was found that the overall burnout level of pre-school teachers was relatively low, which is in line with the existing literature (Akman, Taşkın, Özden & Çörtü, 2010; Yılmaz-Toplu, 2012).

It was ascertained that there was a statistically significant, moderately negative correlation between the burnout level of pre-school teachers and their perception of professional social support. This suggests that the burnout level of pre-school teachers increases if the level of their perceived professional social support falls down. The previous researches indicate that the social support has both a direct and conciliatory effect on the burnout. Social support perceived in the workplace reduces the burnout level of pre-school teachers (Ju, Lan, Li, Feng & You, 2015). In the same vein, there is a correlation between emotional social support and the burnout according to another study conducted again on teachers. It is found that the burnout level of those receiving emotional support is relatively low whereas the burnout level of those receiving no emotional support is high (Kahn et al., 2006). It was observed that, on individuals feeling the positive effect of social support, the effect of stress was alleviated (Dahlem, Zimet,

Walker, 1991). As well as previous leading researches, more contemporary researches underline the importance of social support.

As per the results of regression analysis, support of the school principal, student support, effective educational support and overall professional social support reduce the burnout level of pre-school teachers. Pre-school teachers' perception of professional social support explains 16% of the change in the burnout level. In a similar vein, other researches also reported that teachers with low level of perceived professional social support were likely to suffer professional burnout (Sarros & Sarros 1992; Cheuk & Wong, 1995; Chesnutt, 1997; Gökçekan & Özer, 1997; Brouwers et al., 2001; Girgin & Baysal, 2005; Bataineh & Alsagheer, 2012; Fiorilli, Albanese, Gabola & Pepe, 2017).

There exist studies deducing that one of the means of coping effectively with professional burnout pertains to the perception of professional social support (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Lin, 2006). The study co-authored by Yüksel, Kaner and Güzeller (2011) on teachers argues that teachers' perception of professional social support affects positively their faith in their teaching self-competency. Teachers' perception of professional social support has a moderately negative association with their professional burnout level.

That being the case, it can be asserted that teachers who cannot feel that they have schools principals presenting opportunities for professional development and creating a school culture based on cooperation, co-workers offering support to their professional and personal problems, cooperative families and students making them feel that they are good teachers are likely to have high burnout levels. In this situation, teachers will fail to enjoy teaching profession and feel averse to their students and co-workers. Thus, it is essential to identify the factors associated with the burnout suffered by teachers and to provide teachers with support services in light of their needs.

There are some limitations in this research. The first of these is the sample group. In future research, data can be collected from different cities and different teacher groups. In subsequent studies, the same variables can be analyzed in larger and more diverse sample of teachers and longitudinal studies can be used. For both subjects, comparative studies can be conducted based on working conditions and income structure. The strongest negative correlation of the burnout was with the sub-scale 'support of the school principal'. In-service trainings can be given to the school principals about the importance of support of the school principal. Providing more types of support for teachers in schools may prevent them from feeling burnout.

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