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A Comparative Study of Coping Mechanisms and Job Burnout among Iranian and Indian High School Teachers

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The relationship between coping mechanism variables and job burnout variables was examined among the high school teachers from Iran and India, to find out the differences in coping mechanisms and job burnout of the Iranian and Indian teachers, and to study the role of coping mechanisms in job burnout among these teachers. The instruments used to measure the variables were: 1) The Ways of Coping Questionnaire by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) and 2) Maslach Burnout Inventory by Maslach and Jackson (1981). The data were collected from 300 teachers from Iran and 300 teachers from India. 137 female teachers and 163 male teachers were teaching in high schools in Tehran (Iran), and 160 female teachers and 140 male teachers were teaching in high schools in Pune (India). The statistical techniques of descriptive statistics, and two-way ANOVA statistics were employed to analyze the data. The results indicated that: (1) Iranian teachers, compared to the Indian teachers, were higher in the use of problem-focused coping mechanism ($p < .01$). But, there were no significant differences between Iranian and Indian teachers in the use of emotion-focused coping mechanism; (2) There were no significant differences between Iranian and Indian teachers on job burnout in the areas of emotional exhaustion and loss of personal accomplishment. However, Indian teachers, compared to the Iranian teachers, were higher on job burnout in the area of depersonalization ($p < .01$).

Keywords: coping mechanisms, job burnout, high school teachers

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The main life stress is a topic with which most of us are familiar because it is discussed not only in text books but often in the popular press and media (Riggio, 2000). A stressor is any force that pushes a psychological or physical factor beyond its range of stability, producing a strain within the individual (Cooper, 1996). During recent decades, a considerable amount of attention has been paid to job burnout (Siguero, Perez, Conzalez, & Cermeno, 2003). In one theoretical model, job burnout is proposed to be a response to stressful work conditions. Burnout is a behavior shown by individuals who are in emotionally demanding situations (van der Ploeg, & Kleber, 2003). It involves emotional exhaustion, feeling of low personal accomplishment, and depersonalization or callous behavior toward one's client (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). That is, burnout is when one feels emotionally drained and believes that he/she is of no consequence at home and work. Theory driven studies of burnout had not been fully developed earlier. Later attention was given to both the development and testing models of burnout (e.g., Lee 2003; Maslach, 1993). One of the main reasons has been the impact of job burnout in the occurrence of psychosomatic diseases (such as blood pressure and digestion problems) as well as the prevalence of job burnout in a society on a wider scale. For example, the World Health Organization (WHO) (1987) has declared that half of the working population is dissatisfied with their job and 90% of the working population believes that their jobs do not comply to their life objectives, and 75% others are seeking medical assistance as a result of job dissatisfaction and lack of capability.

Considerable research attention has recently been devoted to the incidence of job burnout among teachers. Many empirical efforts have been attempted to identify antecedents and consequences of teachers' job burnout and psychological health in every different countries such as Great Britain (Travers & Cooper, 1993), Australia (Hart, 1994), China (Hui & Chan, 1996, Yu, Li, Yang, Gu, Ma, LQ, & Duan, 2003).), the Netherlands (De Heus & Diekstra, 1999), Italy and France (Pedrabissi, Rolland. & Santinello., 1993).

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Coping is believed to be an important predictor of adaptation. Effective behavioral or cognitive coping responses to stress are believed to lead to increased feelings of efficacy and reduced levels of stress and anxiety. In particular, coping strategies such as problem solving, cognitive decision making or other active strategies are associated with lower levels of symptoms (e.g., Causey & Dubow, 1991), whereas avoidant strategies are associated with higher levels of symptoms (e.g., Blalok & Joiner, 2000; Chang, Lee, Connor, Davidson, Jefiries & Lai 2003; Gomez, 1998; Lambert & Lambert, 2004). Thus, different coping strategies appear to be more or less adaptive ways of dealing with stress.

A theory of the types of values on which cultures can be compared, uses data from nations around the world. Iranians can be quite external in their locus of control, attributing control of events to forces outside of themselves (House, Hanges, Ruiz-Quintanilla, Dorfman, Javidan, Dickson & Gupta, 1999; Bhattacharya, Ghosh, & Dasgupta, 2003). Control itself has been linked to perceptions of both job stressors and job strains (Matud, 2004; Mearns, & Cain, 2003). Spector, Copper, Sanchez, O'Driscoll, Sparks, Bernin, Bussing, Dewe, Hart, Miller, Renault de Moraes, Ostognay, Pagon, Pitariu, Poelmans, Radhakrishnan, Russinova, Salamatov, Salagado, Shima, Siu, Stora, Teichmann, Theorell, Vlerick, Westman, Widerszal-Bazyl, Wong, & Yu (2001) in their comparison of 24 countries found that at the country mean level, collectivism was associated with externality in locus of control. Furthermore, countries in which people were external tended to score high in job strains. Literature discussed in our introduction suggested that Iranians tend to be collectivistic, which would be expected to be associated with externality in locus of control. This externality was expected to be associated with higher perceived stressors and higher job strains.

Cross-cultural research is important in ascertaining the impact of cultural environment at the level of societies or social systems (Hofstede, 1991). Although the concepts of stress and coping were incorporated in ancient

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Brahmanism and Buddhist philosophies of Asia (Palsane & Lam, 1996), scientific research in this area is a fairly recent phenomenon. Theoretically, generalized beliefs about locus of control are likely to influence the choice of coping strategies (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).Thus, internals are expected to use problem–focused coping more than the externals who would use emotion–focused methods. Focus upon the culture–relevant dimensions of stress and coping is clearly evident in several recent studies on immigrants, refugees, and ethnic and minority groups within the mainstream Euro–cultural societies (Berry, 1997). The several studies on Iranian and Indian teachers showed that the teachers were going through high degree of stress and job burnout (Attar, 1995; Rezai, 1994; Ghobari Bonab, Nabavi, & Shirkohi, 2006; Dehshiri, 2005; Bani Hashemi, Ahmadi, 2006; Ushasree, Reddy, & Vinolya, 1995). Some studies in Iran showed that high degree of stress and job burnout among nurses and employees (Sadat Dibaj, Bahrami, & Abedi, 2009; Sabahi, & Oreyzi, 2008; Ghoamali Lavassani, Keyvanzad, & Arjmand, 2008; Asadi, Borjali, & Jomehri, 2007; Ahghar, 2007).

Results revealed that teaching is a high-stress occupation with cross-cultural characteristics. Furthermore, negative and cynical attitudes towards their work, students, colleagues and the organization as a whole are observed. This attitude, which is often evaluated on a moral level, should be considered also as a final stage of the burnout syndrome (Pisanti, Gagliardi, Razzino, & Bertini, 2003).The most impressive data sets in this work come from Schwartz's cross-cultural studies of teachers. Therefore, the present study was planned: to find out the differences if any, in coping mechanisms and job burnout of the Iranian and Indian teachers. To study the role of coping mechanisms in job burnout in teachers, the following hypotheses were proposed:

1. Iranian teachers will be higher in the use of problem-focused coping mechanism compared to Indian teachers.
2. Indian teachers will be higher in the use of emotion-focused coping

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mechanism compared to Iranian teachers.

3. Indian teachers will be higher on job burnout (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and loss of personal accomplishment) compared to Iranian teachers.

Method

Sample

The sample taken for the study included 300 teachers from Iran and 300 teachers from India in 2005. There were 137 female teachers and 163 male teachers from 53 high schools in Tehran city (Iranian sample) and there were 160 female teachers and 140 male teachers from 53 high schools in Pune city (Indian sample) who were selected through the multi-level sampling method from districts of Tehran and Pune as subjects in this study. Their age range was from 25 to 55 years (average age about 40). They were teaching the 10^{th}–12^{th} standard students. These teachers were teaching elementary science (Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry and Biology) to these classes. All the teachers who participated in the study were married, had minimum 5 years of teaching experience and were permanent in the job. The participants were trained teachers.

Variables and Tools

Ways of Coping Questionnaire. The coping mechanisms were measured by the *Ways of Coping Questionnaire*, developed and standardized by Lazarus and Folkman (1984). This questionnaire consists of 66 items and eight scales. The scales are: 1. Confrontive coping, 2. Distancing, 3. Self controlling, 4. Seeking social support, 5. Accepting responsibility, 6. Escape-Avoidance, 7. Planful Problem Solving, and 8. Positive Reappraisal. These items have to be responded to, on a "4-point scale" ranging from “not used” to “used to a great deal”. The items on the original ways of coping checklist were classified on the basis of rater’s judgments about being "problem-focused" or "emotion-

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focused"(Lazarus and Folkman, 1984).

"Problem-focused coping" has four scales, namely, Seeking social support, Accepting responsibility, Planful problem solving, and Positive reappraisal. Similarly, "Emotion-focused coping" also has four scales, viz., Confrontive coping, Distancing, Self-controlling, and Escape-avoidances.

The alpha coefficient for the eight scales is higher than the alpha reported for most of other measures of coping process.

Sr. No.	Variable	alpha coefficient
1	Confronting coping	.70
2	Distancing	.60
3	Self controlling	.70
4	Accepting responsibility	.66
5	Escape Avoidance	.72
6	Planful problem solving	.68
7	Positive reappraisal	.79
8	Seeking social support	.76

For the present study, forward-backward translation was done from English to Persian and back, the alpha reliability of Persian version ranged from minimum .60 to maximum .71 for the various subscales. For the Indian sample, the original English version was used and its alpha reliability ranged from minimum .67 to maximum .78 for the subscales.

The items in this questionnaire have face validity since the explained strategies are those that individuals have reported as using, for coping with stressful environments they face. The construct validity was confirmed and substantiated by two studies, by Manne and Sandler (1984). They found factor analytic support for eight factor structure of the *Ways of Coping Checklist*.

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Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI). Job burnout was measured by the *Job Burnout Questionnaire*, developed and standardized by Maslach and Jackson (1981). This is a widely used scale, and it consists of 22 statements that assess the three facets of professional burnout, viz., emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and lack of personal accomplishment. The emotional exhaustion was regarded as the basic individual stress component of the syndrome (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). The respondents identity as to how often they feel professional burnout on a "six-point Likert-type rating scale" ranging from "never" (0) to "every day" (6). This scale has been employed in a considerable number of Greek and international studies that have investigated the professional burnout of a substantial number of occupations, such as civil servants, doctors, and teachers in special and mainstream schools (Kanas, 1996). There was a study among teachers in Iran (Ghobari Bonab, Nabavi, & Shirkohi, 2006).

Reliability coefficients reported here were based on samples that were not used in the item selections to avoid any improper inflation of the reliability estimates. Iwanicki and Schwab (1981) reported Cronbach alpha internal reliability estimates of .90 for emotional exhaustion, .76 for depersonalization, and .76 for personal accomplishment. Gold (1984) reported slightly lower estimates of .88, .74, and .72, respectively.

The validity of the MBI was substantiated by studies conducted by Iwanicki and Schwab (1981). In this research, it was factor analytic support for the three factor structure of the MBI. It was used after obtaining a forward and backward translation into Persian language.

Data Collection. The participants were approached in the schools and were asked to be seated in an office in the high schools. They were told that this was a research to compare Iranian and Indian teachers on their use of coping mechanisms and job burnout. Their cooperation was solicited, and confidentiality was assured that their responses would be used for research

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purposes only. The answer sheets of the tests were stitched together and the measures were administered in the school office.

Results

The descriptive statistics given in Tables 1 and 2 would be useful in interpreting the results of the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) presented subsequently. The group wise values (*M*, *SD* and *N*) presented in the cells are as: Iranian males vs. Iranian females; Indian males vs. Indian females; and total males vs. total females. This is in order to compare the groups based on their respective mean scores. The Means, *SD*s, and *N* for the sub-variables of Coping Mechanisms (emotion-focused and problem-focused), Job Burnout (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and loss of personal accomplishment) are given in Tables 1 and 2, respectively.

Table 1.
Means, Standard Deviations and Number for Coping Mechanism Variables

Sr. No.	Variable		Iran			India			Total		
	Coping Mechanisms		Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total
1	Problem-Focused	*M*	36.57	37.19	36.85	36.69	32.67	34.55	36.62	34.65	35.70
		SD	10.76	10.24	10.51	10.51	10.80	10.83	10.63	10.77	10.73
		N	163	137	300	140	159	299	303	296	599
2	Emotion-Focused	*M*	32.97	35.67	34.21	36.15	32.98	34.46	34.43	34.23	34.33
		SD	10.91	9.66	10.43	11.01	10.98	11.09	11.05	10.46	10.75
		N	163	137	300	139	159	298	302	296	598

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Table 2.
Means, Standard Deviations and Number for Job Burnout variables

Sr. No.	Variable		Iran			India			Total		
	Job Burnout		Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total
1	Emotional Exhaustion	*M*	16.11	8.64	12.70	14.32	11.85	13.00	15.28	10.37	12.85
		SD	13.57	8.62	12.14	7.75	8.32	8.14	11.28	8.59	10.33
		N	163	137	300	140	160	300	303	297	600
2	Depersonalization	*M*	4.82	2.40	3.72	7.20	4.85	5.94	5.92	3.72	4.83
		SD	5.51	3.58	4.87	6.26	4.81	5.65	5.98	4.45	5.39
		N	163	137	300	140	160	300	303	297	600
3	Loss of Personal Accomplish	*M*	29.08	31.36	30.12	28.16	29.94	29.11	28.66	30.59	29.62
		SD	11.73	11.47	11.65	12.55	10.85	11.69	12.10	11.14	11.67
		N	163	137	300	139	160	299	302	297	599

Table 3.
Two-way ANOVA for Problem-Focused Coping Mechanism among Male, Female and Iranian, Indian teachers

Source of variations	Sum of squares	*df*	Mean square	*F*
Sex	427.01	1	427.01	3.80*
Country	719.139	1	719.139	6.40*
Sex * Country	801.406	1	801.406	7.133**
Error	66852.05	595	112.356	
Total	832698.000	599		

** $p < .01$ * $p < .05$

The results of the Two-way ANOVA, given in Table 3, indicated that there were significant differences (F (1, 595) =3.80, p,.05) between male and female teachers in the use of problem-focused coping mechanism. The group means,

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presented in Table 1, indicated that the male teachers (*M*=36.62) compared to the female teachers (*M*=34.65) had higher problem-focused coping mechanism. Also there were significant differences ($F(1, 595)=6.40$, $p<.05$) between Iranian and Indian teachers in the use of problem-focused coping mechanism. Iranian teachers (*M*=36.85) compared to the Indian teachers (*M*=34.55) had higher problem-focused coping mechanism. It was noted that there was a significant interaction effect ($F(1, 595)=7.133$, $p<.01$) of sex and country on problem-focused coping mechanism (see Table 3). The group means, presented in Table 1, indicated that the Iranian female teachers (*M*=37.19) compared to the Indian female teachers (*M*=32.67) had higher problem-focused coping mechanism.

Table 4.
Two-way ANOVA for Emotion-Focused Coping Mechanism among Male, Female and Iranian, Indian teachers

Source of variations	Sum of squares	*df*	Mean square	*F*
Sex	7.871	1	7.871	.069
Country	8.710	1	8.710	.076
Sex * Country	1278.784	1	1278.784	11.205**
Error	67793.573	594	114.131	
Total	774113.00	598		

** $p < .01$

In Table 4, Two-way ANOVA showed that there were no significant differences between male and female teachers and Iranian and Indian teachers in the use of emotion-focused coping mechanism. But there was a significant interaction effect ($F(1, 594)=11.20$, $p<.01$) of sex and country on the emotion-focused coping mechanism of teachers. The group means, presented in Table 1, indicated that the Indian male teachers (M=36.15), compared to the Iranian male teachers (M=32.97), and the Iranian female teachers (M=35.67), compared to the Indian female teachers (M=32.98), had higher emotion-focused coping mechanism.

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Table 5.
Two-way ANOVA for Job Burnout variable (emotional exhaustion) among Male, Female and Iranian, Indian Teachers

Source of variations	Sum of squares	*df*	Mean square	*F*
Sex	3677.13	1	3677.13	36.93***
Country	74.26	1	74.26	.74
Sex * Country	932.54	1	932.54	9.36**
Error	59336.19	596	99.55	
Total	163130.00	600		

*** $p < .001$ ** $p < .01$

The results of the Two-way ANOVA, presented in Table 5, showed that there were significant gender differences ($F(1, 596)=36.39$, $p<.01$) among teachers on job burnout in the area of emotional exhaustion. Male teachers (M=15.28) compared to the female teachers (M=10.37) had higher emotional exhaustion.

The results of the Two-way ANOVA (Table.4) showed that there were no significant differences between Iranian and Indian teachers on job burnout in the area of emotional exhaustion. But a significant interaction effect (F (1, 596) =9.36, $p<.01$) of sex and country was noted on the emotional exhaustion of teachers. The group means, presented in Table 2, showed that Iranian males (M=16.11) compared to the Indian males (M=14.32), and Indian females (M=11.85) compared to the Iranian females (M=8.64) had higher emotional exhaustion.

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Table 6.
Two-way ANOVA for Job Burnout variable (depersonalization) among Male, Female and Iranian, Indian Teachers

Source of variations	Sum of squares	*df*	Mean square	*F*
Sex	847.94	1	847.94	31.94***
Country	863.49	1	863.49	32.52***
Sex * Country	.180	1	.180	.007
Error	15821.10	596	26.54	
Total	31437.00	600		

*** $p < .001$

The results of the Two-way ANOVA, presented in Table 6, showed that there were significant gender differences (F (1, 596)=31.94, p <.01) among teachers on job burnout in the area of depersonalization. Male teachers (M=5.92) compared to the female teachers (M=3.72) had higher depersonalization. Also there were significant differences (F (1, 596)=32.52, p<.01) between Iranian and Indian teachers on depersonalization. Indian teachers (M=5.94) compared to Iranian teachers (M=3.72) had higher scores on depersonalization.

Table 7.
Two-way ANOVA for Job Burnout variable (loss of personal accomplishment) among Male, Female and Iranian, Indian teachers

Source of variations	Sum of squares	*df*	Mean square	*F*
Sex	612.465	1	612.46	4.51*
Country	204.002	1	204.00	1.50
Sex * Country	9.33	1	9.33	.69
Error	80704.23	595	135.63	
Total	607104.00	599		

* $p < .05$

In Table 7, Two-way ANOVA showed that there were significant gender differences (F (1, 595) = 4.51), p <.05) among teachers on job burnout in the area of loss of personal accomplishment. Female teachers (M=30.59)

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compared to the male teachers (*M*=28.66) had higher loss of personal accomplishment. The results of the two-way ANOVA showed that there were no significant differences between Iranian and Indian teachers on loss of personal accomplishment.

Discussion

The hypothesis [number 1] stating that "Iranian teachers will be higher in use of problem-focused coping mechanism compared to Indian teachers" was supported. The results of the Two-way ANOVA (Table 3) indicated that there were significant differences between Iranian and Indian teachers in use of problem-focused coping mechanism. It was noted that the Iranian teachers were using more problem-focused coping mechanism than the Indian teachers did. Vitalino, Dewolfe, Maiuro, Russo, & Katon (1990) found that, work related problem lead people most commonly to attempt problem-focused coping mechanism, such as taking direction or seeking help from others. The Iranians are likely to develop concrete plans of action and exert as much direct control as possible. Maybe Iranian teachers prefer use of problem-focused coping mechanism because after the war between Iraq and Iran, economic growth showed down. Iranian peoples both females and males stated working hard and tried to develop effective life style at an individual and cultural level. People in general went for higher education, more upward mobility, and this in turn must have brought greater dynamics and action in them. Thus, problem-focused coping must have been adapted as the best mode of behavior. There were not many comparative studies related to coping methods and stress in these cultures. But Sinha (1999) compared the Indian and Canadian students with respect to stress and coping. It was found that the Indian students report less stress than the Canadian students and prefer emotion-focused coping strategies. Bativala (1990) compared the Indian and American executives on the stress experienced at their personal and organizational levels. It was found that the Indians, though high on stress, were able to cope better using a few strategies like Yoga, practicing good management, and trust in oneself, etc.,

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better than the American executives did. Bativala (1990) also suggested that there was no one best coping technique and every person learnt from his/her own experience to transform stress into an asset.

The hypothesis [number 2] stating that 'Indian teachers will be higher in the use of emotion-focused coping mechanism compared to Iranian teachers' was not supported. The results showed that there were no significant differences between Iranian and Indian teachers in the use of emotion-focused coping mechanism. One possible reason for the absence of difference between the Iranian and Indian teachers in emotion-focused coping mechanism may be due to certain similarities in the culture (like cultural values and importance of personal relationships) and job responsibilities among Iranian and Indian teachers would be expected to be associated with externality in locus of control, life orientation (optimism, pessimism), and social support. This finding was different from an earlier study by Moheb (2003) where she compared Iranian and Indian students on coping with stress and found that Iranian females scored greater on confrontational coping, distancing coping and accepting responsibility than Indian female students. The researcher has explained it in terms of the more stress faced by Iranian females, compared to the Indian females, and therefore the different ways of coping with stress that the former were likely to adopt.

The hypothesis [number 3] stating that 'Indian teachers will be higher on job burnout (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and loss of personal accomplishment) compared to Iranian teachers' was partly supported. The results of the Two-way ANOVA showed that there were no significant differences between Indian and Iranian teachers on job burnout in the area of emotion exhaustion and loss of personal accomplishment. Maslach,. Schaufeli, & Leiter (2001) found that the cultural differences produce an effect on job burnout in different countries, the percentage of burnout in Asian countries was generally much more than European countries and America. A possible reason for the above findings may be that there is a cultural similarity between

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these two countries (Iran and India) with respect to cultural values, historical background and the importance of interpersonal relationships, conservatism and hierarchy culture values, etc. According to Markus and Kitiyama (1996), the relation is more interpersonal rather than personal among the Asian staff.

The results of the Two-way ANOVA (Table 6) showed that there was a significant difference ($F(1, 596)=32.52$, $p<.01$) between Indian and Iranian teachers' job burnout in the area of depersonalization. Indian teachers compared to the Iranian teachers had higher depersonalization. According to Malach and Jackson (1981), depersonalization is, the emotional distancing from direct care clients that results in a callous and uncaring attitude toward others. Depersonalization can be seen as a defence against emotional exhaustion (Maslach). Depersonalization is not the only possible way of coping with emotional exhaustion, but in the human services it maybe viable when other coping strategies are not easily available (Asforth & Lee, 1990; Olotsson, Bengtsson, & Brink , 2003; Rendeep, & Ravindran , 2005; Shimazu, et al, 2003). One of the possible reasons for this finding maybe that Indians work hard for the upward mobility and to fulfil the financial and cultural status in India. The British and Western impact is spreading fast due to the higher education. Therefore, the exhaustion and especially depersonalization would be higher in Indian teachers. Both countries could be the same on collectivism values, but Indians are likely to have greater mastery values compare to Iranians. In other words, Iranians are likely to have greater harmony values. Because of the value differences in cultures, Indian teachers might be showing higher depersonalization compare to Iranian teachers.

Limitations

One of the limitations of the study was the nature of the sample. The study should have been extended to the other sections of the population, viz. the younger and aged, the working and retired and also the youth. This would give a fairly good picture of the cross-cultural differences. Therefore, the present

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findings are limited to the specific sample and, therefore, cannot be generalized.

Suggestions

Certain suggestions for the future research are:

1. The present study was limited to High School teachers. A similar study may be conducted on Primary School teachers with a sample from different age groups. Differences across gender and age-groups could be explored among all the variables.
2. Future studies can explore the job burnout and coping mechanism among other professional groups, such as, management, medical and engineering professionals.

3.Further research in the field of cross-cultural differences in job burnout may be done and their relation to personality variables could be identified in order to understand the relationship between personality variables, cultural factors, and the resulting job burnout.

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