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## The role of coping styles in predicting job burnout in middle aged by controlling the gender variable

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### Abstract

**Background and Objective:** middle age is defined as a stage of psychological development in the context of life or the transitional period that includes biological, psychological and social changes. Middle-aged people can face with significant adjustment challenges in the workplace. In the discussion of psychological development in middle age, job burnout is a condition in which long-term job stress leads to emotional exhaustion, lack of personal fulfillment and a sense of achievement reduction. The aim of this study was to investigate the relationship between coping with stress styles and job burnout welfare organization staff.

**Methods:** This study is a descriptive and correlational design. The sample in this study included all 40 to 60 year old employees of Tehran Welfare Organization who were working in the organization during the autumn 2014. For sampling, single-stage cluster sampling was used in such a way that among 17 centers of Tehran Welfare Organization, 5 centers were randomly selected and all personnel selected at these centers participated in the study. Also, to gather research data, Maslesh Job Burnout Inventory and Lazarus & Folkman Coping Styles were used.

**Results:** The results showed that there is a direct significant correlation between coping style and emotion-focused stress ( $P \leq 0/01$ ) and there is an inverse significant relationship between coping style and problem-focused stress ( $P \leq 0/01$ ) and job burnout among Tehran Welfare Organization staff. Also, both styles of coping style and emotion-focused stress and problem-focused stress are able to predict job burnout.

**Conclusion:** The results of this study consistent with previous research showed that stress coping styles have a significant influence in predicting staffs' job burnout.

### Introduction

Middle age has been defined as a stage of psychological development throughout the life of the transitional period that involves the biological, psychological and social, etc. changes. This period occurs generally in the late 30 or early 40. Middle-aged people in the workplace can face with

significant adjustment challenges (1). In middle age, many workers begin experiencing age-related changes in sensory and physical health and performance and this issue puts their safety in the workplace designed for young at risk (2). A concept that is talk about in the discussion of the problems of the middle period, especially middle age crisis, is job burnout; a concept that is used on the middle ages of employed ones, who are exposed to high levels of stress (1). Job burnout was defined for the first time by Froudenburgh (1974) as a state of fatigue or frustration due to one's dedication to the job, lifestyle, purpose or relationships that have failed to obtain the expected reward (2). Job burnout is a health-related problem in working life today. Maslesh and Jackson (1986) stated that job burnout includes three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and professional inefficacy (4). They expressed emotional exhaustion as stress, feelings of being pressured and losing emotional resources of the person. Depersonalization is in fact a negative and pessimistic attitude towards others. Professional inefficacy also relates to loss of a sense of competence and the successful implementation of the work task or responsibility in relation to others and their negative attitude and evaluation (5). Burke (2001), in discussing the psychological development in middle age, maintains that job burnout is a situation where long-term stress leads to emotional exhaustion, lack of personal fulfillment and a sense of reduced achievement. Job burnout is a work and stress-related syndrome (6 and 7) that can be described as a long-term response to chronic stress at work that influence employees across their profession and industry (7). Job burnout is the result of continuous efforts to adapt to the stress of work or protect against it (6). When the person in the workplace or living conditions faced this situation with that does not match with his current capacity and facilities, the person is affected with conflicts and internal challenges that is called stress (8). The first efforts to define stress in the behavioral or psychological fields was conducted by Volter Cannon. He defined stress as a syndrome of fight or flight (9). This concept was more considered as

understood by the works of Hans Selye on general adaptation syndrome. In 1950, Selye used the term stress. He defined general adaptation syndrome as the process of general efforts of body against stressful factors (10, 11). Stress is a pattern of negative psychological and physiological states responses that occur in person (12). Stress does not affect only the physical health but also affect the psychological well-being (11). Stress also has a negative impact on the working performance and causes reduced permanently motivation and fatigue (12).

Lazarus et al. (1978) presented theory of stress and coping styles. According to their theory, individual adaptation and coping with stress involves two processes of cognitive assessment and stressful factors evaluation, and then try to deal with those factors (13). Coping is defined as cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific internal or external demands that beyond the individual's resources, (6). According to Mastert and Joubert (2005), coping can be described as one's efforts to stop, reduce or eliminate the negative experiences (14). According to the theories proposed by Lazarus and colleagues, two initial coping responses were stated: emotion-focused coping and problem-focused coping (13). The problem-focused coping style is focused mainly on the management or changing stressors, coping style on the other hand emphasized on expressing emotional responses to the problem (14).

Individuals act in different styles in a stressful situation. They can act as problem-focused or emotion-focused or sometimes they use both methods (7). In fact, some people know how to deal with stress and challenging pressures and know how to avoid the detrimental effects of the stimuli (8).

Inadequate and ineffective coping skills can severely lead people toward job burnout (14). Researchers found that the risk of experiencing job burnout can be adjusted through various coping strategies in an environment in which there is mental stress (7). Several studies have shown that older people use less coping style of avoidance or escape from reality and use problem-focused coping style more (15). The relationship between age, stress and the process of dealing with it is complex (2).

There are evidences of the relationship between coping style, stress and burnout (6). The results of studies on stress management strategies have shown that when people are able to effectively deal with stress that face with the problem or use problem-focused strategies that requires their action (12). For

example, Hart and colleagues (1995) (7) found that problem-focused coping style leads to positive working experience, while emotion-oriented coping style leads to negative working experience. (7). Also, Moscow and colleagues (12) in a study found that managers who use problem-focused coping styles of the managers who use emotion-focused coping styles experience significantly lower levels of stress and have fewer work absences. Results of a study showed that there is a relationship between strategies of dealing with stress and job burnout among teachers (3). Over a study conducted in South Africa, researchers found that police officers who use emotion-focused coping style in the time of working stress experience emotional exhaustion and cynicism, while police officers who use of cognitive and active coping styles can modify their stress and job burnout (14). White Hyde et al (2000) reported higher levels of job burnout in the middle age. But other researchers in their study found no significant difference between job burnout and age (16). Another study results also showed that people who are older use more problem-oriented coping style (13).

Another study on the relationship between perfectionism and coping with stress strategies and job burnout showed that there is a significant negative correlation between the problem-oriented coping style and job burnout (17). In another study entitled investigating the stressful factors in coping strategies and their relationship with job burnout, it was found that there is a positive significant relationship between stressful factors and job burnout (18, 19).

Given that few studies has been done on the relationship between coping with stress styles and burnout in middle age in Iran and given that the results in this area is somewhat ambiguous, the present study aimed to explore this relationship and seeks to answer this question whether there is a relationship between coping with stress styles and job burnout in the middle age.

#### **Method:**

The present study is descriptive and is considered in the field of applied research. The current research design is a correlation design. The statistical population in this research includes all employees aged 40-60 years working in Tehran Welfare Organization who were working in Tehran Welfare

centers during the fall 2014. According to the staffs' statistics in this organization in Tehran, a total of nearly 500 people were selected. According to Morgan table that specifies the minimum sample size as 217 people, the sample size in this study was 231. For sampling, single-stage cluster sampling was used so that among the 17 centers of Tehran Welfare Organization, 5 center were randomly selected and all the personnel of these centers selected were participated in the study. Finally, the data were analyzed using Pearson's correlation coefficients and simultaneous multivariate regression.

**Research Tools:**

Two questionnaires namely Maslach Burnout Inventory and Lazarus and Folkman's Coping with Stress Strategies Inventory were used.

**Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI):** It is most common tool for measuring job burnout. This questionnaire has been known as a means of assessing the gold standard for measuring job burnout and includes three independent measures of 22 separate article about the feelings and attitudes that assess different aspects of job burnout syndrome. 9 articles addresses emotional analysis, 5 articles to depersonalization and 8 articles to the lack of personal achievement. The frequency of these feelings is measured with scores of zero (never) to six (every day). Internal consistency in all three dimensions of Job Burnout Inventory in the original sample (11,000 people) with Cronbach's alpha between 0.71 to 0.9 is in an acceptable level. Retest coefficients in short periods up to one month is 0.6 to 0.8. In two studies, test-retest reliability over a period of one year is investigated. Reliability coefficients in a sample with 700 tutors was 0.33 to 0.67 and in another sample includes 46 employed people in human services between 0.34 to 0.62, respectively. In Iran, the reliability and validity of these instruments is considered. Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the test on hospital staff in Isfahan for emotional analysis was 0.88, 0.76 for personal accomplishment, 0.79 for depersonalization and 0.83 for the whole test (8).

**Coping Strategies Questionnaire:** it is a 66-article test that is based on coping strategies checklist (20) applied by Lazarus and Folkman (1985) in a wide range of thoughts and actions that people use when faced with internal or external stressful situations. At the beginning the subjects are asked to explain stressful situations that they recently experienced orally or written and then determine to what extent

they use the following strategies in the regarded situation by reading questionnaire expressions. In some cases, the researcher specifies a position, such as medical treatment or a scientific test to determine a stressful situation. The test has eight sub-scales: a direct confrontation, distancing, self-control, seeking social support, accepting responsibility, evasion- avoidance, planned problem solving and positive reappraisal. In this questionnaire without time constraints for being implemented, the subjects are asked to both visualize the experienced position where they used confrontation strategies and respond the questions based on four-scale options. The test is normalized on a sample of 750 middle-aged couple. Cronbach's alpha coefficients of subscales is reported as follows: direct confrontation subscale: 0.70, distancing subscale: 0.61, self-control subscale: 0.70, seeking social support: 0.76, taking of responsibility subscale: 0.66, evasion-avoidance subscale: 0.72, planned problem-solving subscale: 0.67, positive re-appraisal subscale: 0.79 that the amounts indicated good reliability of this test. In a study on 763 male and female students in grades two and three of public high schools in Tehran, the reliability of coping styles questionnaire were estimated using internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) as 0.80. In this study, to evaluate the convergent validity of coping strategies questionnaire, calculating the raw scores correlation resulted from this questionnaire with raw scores of Lionel Stress Questionnaire was used. The results showed that WOCQ test has high convergent validity. Also, the results of principal component analysis and Varimax rotation showed that the scale of coping styles is made up of 10 factors with factor loading more than 0.3 (8).

**Findings:**

To investigate research results, Pearson correlation coefficient was first calculated between the scores of each coping with stress styles and dimensions of job burnout among Welfare Organization Staff of Tehran. Then, to determine the contribution of each coping styles in predicting job burnout of welfare organization staff in Tehran province, simultaneous multiple regression was used.

Table 1: descriptive indices of research variables

Scale	Mean	Standard deviation	Minimum	Maximum	Skewness factor	Elongation factor
Emotion-focused coping	40.20	7.58	18	60	0.14	0.28
Problem-focused coping	38.80	8.23	20	57	-0.25	-0.20
Emotional analysis	15.47	7.42	1	36	0.37	0.02
Depersonalization	10.10	4.61	0	22	-0.11	-0.08
Lack of interpersonal relationship	12.65	5.91	0	29	0.23	-0.18
Job burnout	38.23	14.59	8	78	0.18	-0.55

The results in Table 2 indicate that there is a significant correlation between emotional analysis scores ( $r = 0/426$ ), depersonalization ( $r = 0/241$ ) and interpersonal relationship ( $r = 0/202$ ) with emotion-focused coping style ( $P \leq 0.01$ ). The results also showed that there is an inverse correlation between emotional analysis ( $r = -0 / 457$ ), depersonalization ( $r = -0 / 296$ ) and interpersonal relationship ( $r = -0 / 308$ ) with problem-oriented coping style ( $P \leq 0.01$ ). In other words, increasing the scores of emotion-focused coping style and reducing problem-focused coping style increase scores of job burnout and vice versa.

Table 2: Correlation Matrix of coping styles and aspects of job burnout

	Emotion-focused	Problem-focused	Emotional analysis	Depersonalization	Interpersonal relationship	Job burnout
Emotion-focused	1					
Problem-focused	-0.337**	1				
Emotional analysis	0.426**	-0.457**	1			
Depersonalization	0.241**	-0.296**	0.563**	1		
Interpersonal relationship	0.202**	-0.308**	0.427**	0.469**	1	
Job burnout	0.375**	-0.451**	0.860**	0.792**	0.771**	1

n= 231 \*\*= $P < 0.01$  \*= $P < 0.05$

Also, to determine the contribution of each styles of coping stress in predicting job burnout of Tehran Welfare staff, multiple regression analysis was used. Therefore, given the assumptions of linearity, normality, constant variance and linearity, multiple regression analysis was performed. The results of simultaneous multiple regression analysis method is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Summary of multiple regression analysis of job burnout prediction of Tehran Welfare staff through coping styles

Variable	F	R	R <sup>2</sup>	B	$\beta$	P
Constant				43.962	-	0.001
Emotion-focused coping	39.875	0.509	0.259	0.484	0.251	0.001
Problem-focused coping				-0.649	-0.366	0.001

Table 3 summarizes the multiple regression analysis of job burnout in Tehran Welfare staff through stress coping styles. Assuming that R<sup>2</sup> is the common variance percentage of emotion-focused coping styles and problem-focused coping styles in predicting staffs' job burnout of Tehran Welfare Organization, the results of above table shows that all variables used (emotion and problem-focused coping styles) predicts 26% of the variance in job burnout among Tehran Welfare Organization staff. Given the calculated F is significant at the level of less than 0.01, thus linear regression model is significant. Regression analysis results showed that emotion and problem-focused coping styles ( $P \leq 0.01$ ) can significantly predict staffs' job burnout among Tehran Welfare Organization staff. In other words, with increasing the scores of emotion-focused and problem-focused coping styles with stress, job burnout increases among Tehran Welfare Organization staff and vice versa.

**Discussion and Conclusion:**

In the present study, the relationship between coping styles with stress and job burnout in middle age was examined. The results showed there is a direct significant correlation between job burnout among Tehran Welfare Organization staff and emotion-focused coping style ( $P \leq 0.01$ ) and there is a significant inverse relationship between problem-focused coping style and job burnout among Tehran Welfare Organization staff ( $P \leq 0.01$ ). Also, two problem-focused coping style and emotion-focused coping style can predict job burnout. Hence, problem-focused coping style has the highest correlation and the power to explain job burnout among research variables. Burnout is a psychological as well as physical fatigue syndrome, which can lead to negative behavior and attitude towards their work and cause unproductive work and absenteeism, low morale and lack of job satisfaction (5). Job burnout is a serious developmental threat in middle age that is associated

with poor health analysis (21). Long and persistent workplace stress can cause problems such as job burnout and follow problems such as resignation, repeated absenteeism, reduced work efficiency and reduced energy (22). Stress is a negative issue for everyone, research insist that mistakes, failures and obstacles are potentially an opportunity for learning and the resources to deal with future adverse events (13). What is more important in the processes of stress-related diseases than stress and its intensity itself is the type of reaction and response to stressful factors (23). Meeting the demands management process (external or internal) refers to what has been assessed difficult or beyond the resources of individual (20). It is clear that age-related changes in health and social roles influences the experience of stressful factors and this in turn affects the individual coping with stress (15). Two types of general coping strategies are problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping. Problem-focused coping intends to eliminate problem or adjust it, while emotion-focused coping seeks to restrain emotional consequences of stressful factors (20). People use different coping responses in the face of stressful situations. Using a variety of effective and ineffective coping strategies will follow different consequences for physical and mental health of individuals. The results of some studies have shown that inefficient coping in the face of stress leads to increased tension and challenge (23).

According to results of this study, it was found that emotion-focused coping style is positively related to job burnout and the middle ages who use emotion-focused coping have higher job burnout that this finding is consistent with previous findings (24, 25). In previous studies, researchers concluded from their studies that inadequate coping strategies are very important factors of job burnout. In another study, it was also concluded that the way to deal with stress is effective in job burnout (19).

The results also showed that there is a negative inverse relationship between problem-focused coping styles and job burnout and the middle ages who used more problem-focused style have less job burnout. The findings of this study is consistent with previous research that showed there is a negative relationship between problem-focused coping styles and job burnout (7). The results of this study are generally consistent with the results of many previous studies (3, 12, 14 and 18). But the findings of this study are not consistent with the results of other research which stated in their study that there is no relationship between coping styles and job burnout.

According to what has been mentioned, it can be concluded that there is a relationship between coping with stress styles and job burnout among middle age and the ones who use emotion-focused coping style show higher job burnout and the middle age who use problem-focused coping style show less job burnout. The results of this study are consistent with many research mentioned in this field.

Based on the present results, it is recommended that training courses in the field of coping with stress and explaining in job burnout and its symptoms be held for middle-aged to provide knowledge to the people in this regard, and also helped middle-aged people to better face with working stress and use more problem-focused strategies and styles.

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