

2016

Burnout-depression overlap: A study of New Zealand schoolteachers

Renzo Bianchi
University of Neuchâtel


Irvin Sam Schonfeld
CUNY Graduate Center

Eric Mayor
University of Neuchâtel

Eric Laurent
University of Franche-Comté

How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!

Follow this and additional works at: http://academicworks.cuny.edu/cc_pubs

 Part of the [Clinical Psychology Commons](#), [Community Psychology Commons](#), [Education Commons](#), [Health Psychology Commons](#), [Psychiatry Commons](#), and the [Public Health Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Bianchi, R., Schonfeld, I.S., Mayor, E., & Laurent, E. (2016). Burnout-depression overlap: A study of New Zealand schoolteachers. *New Zealand Journal of Psychology*, 45(3), 4-11.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the City College of New York at CUNY Academic Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in Publications and Research by an authorized administrator of CUNY Academic Works. For more information, please contact AcademicWorks@cuny.edu.

Burnout-depression overlap: A study of New Zealand schoolteachers

Renzo Bianchi, Eric Mayor *University of Neuchâtel, Neuchâtel, NE, Switzerland*, **Irvin S Schonfeld** *The City College of the City University of New York, New York USA*, **Eric Laurent** *Bourgogne Franche-Comté University, Besançon, France*

We examined the overlap of burnout with depression in a sample of 184 New Zealand schoolteachers. Burnout and depressive symptoms were strongly correlated with each other ($r = .73$; disattenuated correlation: .82) and moderately correlated with dysfunctional attitudes, ruminative responses, and pessimistic attributions. All the participants with high frequencies of burnout symptoms were identified as clinically depressed. Suicidal ideation was reported by 36% of those participants. Three groups of teachers emerged from a two-step cluster analysis: “low burnout-depression,” “medium burnout-depression,” and “high burnout-depression.” The correlation between the affective-cognitive and somatic symptoms of depression was similar in strength to the burnout-depression correlation. Consistent with recent results obtained in Europe and the U.S., our findings suggest that burnout is a depressive syndrome.

Keywords: burnout; depression; depressive cognitive style; nosology; rumination; stress

Burnout has been conceived of as a long-term, negative affective state consisting of emotional exhaustion, physical fatigue, and cognitive weariness (Shirom & Melamed, 2006; Toker & Biron, 2012). Burnout is considered a product of chronic, unresolvable stress at work (Hobfoll & Shirom, 2001; Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001) and has been associated with a variety of adverse health outcomes (e.g., coronary heart disease; Toker, Melamed, Berliner, Zeltser, & Shapira, 2012). By contrast with an individual experiencing acute, resolvable (work) stress, an individual with burnout feels constantly overwhelmed, drained, and helpless (see Bianchi, Schonfeld, & Laurent, 2015a). Although burnout is not recognized as a diagnostic category in either the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5; American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2013) or the International Classification of Diseases (World Health Organization, 2016), it has been established as a justification for sick leave in several countries, for example, Sweden and The Netherlands (Schaufeli, Leiter, & Maslach, 2009). Burnout has been extensively studied over the last decades (Bianchi, Verkuilen, Brisson, Schonfeld,

& Laurent, 2016).

Depression is primarily characterized by two core symptoms, anhedonia (i.e., loss of interest or pleasure) and depressed mood (APA, 2013). Additional symptoms include weight/appetite alteration, sleep disturbance, psychomotor perturbation, fatigue or loss of energy, feelings of worthlessness or excessive or inappropriate guilt, cognitive impairment (e.g., in terms of concentration and decision-making), and suicidal ideation (APA, 2013). A formal diagnosis of major depressive disorder implies that five (or more) of the aforementioned symptoms have been present during the same two-week period; at least one of the symptoms has to be either depressed mood or anhedonia (APA, 2013). From an etiological standpoint, depression has been related to the experience of unresolvable stress (Gilbert, 2006; Pizzagalli, 2014; Pryce et al., 2011; Willner, Scheel-Krüger, & Belzung, 2013), including unresolvable stress experienced in the occupational domain (e.g., Niedhammer, Malard, & Chastang, 2015; Schonfeld, 2001; Wang, 2005). Depression has been associated with various dispositional correlates and risk factors, such as dysfunctional attitudes (i.e., pathological

perfectionism and need for approval), ruminative responses, and pessimistic attributions (Alloy et al., 2006; Bianchi & Schonfeld, 2016; Michl, McLaughlin, Shepherd, & Nolen-Hoeksema, 2013; Mor & Winqvist, 2002). Depression is a major public health problem (Cuijpers et al., 2014; Kessler et al., 2005). In the 2011/2012 New Zealand Health Survey, 14% of New Zealand adults had been diagnosed for a depression at some point in their lives, with a prevalence reaching 18% in New Zealand women (New Zealand Ministry of Health, 2012).

Over the last few years, an increasing number of studies has suggested that burnout is a depressive syndrome and not a distinct condition (Bianchi et al., 2015a; Bianchi, Schonfeld, & Laurent, 2015c). Burnout and depression have been found to overlap in terms of etiology, symptoms, course, cognitive biases, personality-related vulnerabilities, and allostatic load (e.g., Ahola, Hakonen, Perhoniemi, & Mutanen, 2014; Bianchi & Laurent, 2015; Bianchi & Schonfeld, 2016; Bianchi, Schonfeld, & Laurent, 2015b; Bianchi et al., 2016; Hintsä et al., 2016; Rössler, Hengartner, Ajdacic-Gross, & Angst, 2015; Schonfeld & Bianchi, 2016; Wurm et al., 2016). In addition, burnout and depression have both been associated with impaired work performance, absenteeism, and job turnover (Ahola et al., 2008; Bültmann et al., 2006; Lerner & Henke, 2008; Lexis, Jansen, van Amelsvoort, van den Brandt, & Kant, 2009; Swider & Zimmerman, 2010; Toppinen-Tanner, Ojajarvi, Väänänen, Kalimo, & Jäppinen, 2005). Current research's external validity, however, is limited by the fact that the studies examining burnout-depression overlap have been mainly carried out in Europe and the U.S. Moreover, whether burnout should be considered a depressive syndrome

remains an object of debate (Maslach & Leiter, 2016; Bianchi et al., 2015c; Bianchi et al., 2016). The problem thus requires further inquiry in its own right. In the era of globalization, the characterization of burnout has become a central issue for clinical psychology, occupational medicine, and psychiatry.

The aim of the present study was to examine the overlap of burnout with depression in the New Zealand context. The association of burnout with depression was investigated both directly (e.g., raw and corrected-for-attenuation correlations) and indirectly, through the examination of how burnout and depression were related to dysfunctional attitudes, ruminative responses, and pessimistic attributions—three dispositional factors that have been linked to depression in past research (Alloy et al., 2006; Bianchi & Schonfeld, 2016; Michl et al., 2013; Mor & Winquist, 2002). In order to address the issue of burnout-depression overlap from an extended perspective, we approached the relationship between the two constructs both dimensionally (i.e., as continua) and categorically (i.e., as taxa).

Building on past research conducted in Europe and the U.S., we hypothesized that burnout and depression would show substantial overlap in the present study. More specifically, we expected (a) burnout and depressive symptoms to be strongly correlated and to show similar patterns of association with dysfunctional attitudes, ruminative responses, and pessimistic attributions, (b) individuals with high frequencies of burnout symptoms to be identified as clinically depressed, and (c) burnout and depressive symptoms to cluster together. Some burnout researchers have assumed that burnout and depression cannot be viewed as one single entity because the two constructs share significant, yet limited variance (Schaufeli & Enzmann, 1998; Toker & Biron, 2012). In order to test this assumption, we additionally examined the extent to which the burnout-depression correlation differed in strength from the correlation between the affective-cognitive and somatic symptoms of depression. We reasoned that if the aforementioned assumption is valid, then the burnout-depression correlation should be markedly

weaker than the correlation between the affective-cognitive and somatic symptoms of depression, given that the affective-cognitive and somatic symptoms of depression constitute a unified entity. Conversely, if the burnout-depression correlation turned out to be similar in strength to the correlation between the affective-cognitive and somatic symptoms of depression, then there would be no apparent obstacle to viewing burnout and depression as one entity.

Method

Study participants and data collection

Using the public databases of the New Zealand Department of Education (<http://www.education.govt.nz/>), we contacted school administrators throughout the country. We asked them to transmit a link to an Internet survey to the teachers working in their schools. The Internet survey included measures of burnout, depression, dysfunctional attitudes, ruminative responses, and pessimistic attributions as well as a generic sociodemographic questionnaire. Evidence indicates that online questionnaires are as reliable and valid as traditional, paper-and-pencil questionnaires (Gosling, Vazire, Srivastava, & John, 2004; Jones, Fernyhough, de-Wit, & Meins, 2008). Being a schoolteacher was the only eligibility criterion for taking part in this study. We focused on schoolteachers because (a) burnout-depression overlap has been studied among schoolteachers in Europe and the U.S. and (b) schoolteachers have been thought to be strongly affected by burnout (Maslach et al., 2001).

A total of 184 schoolteachers completed the survey (77% female; mean age: 43; mean length of employment: 15 years). We note that our recruitment procedure did not allow us to estimate our study's response rate. Indeed, we had no information about the number of teachers who actually got access to our survey via school administrators. However, as emphasized by Kristensen (1995), while sample representativeness is a key issue in descriptive studies, its importance in analytical studies such as ours is limited. The crux of the issue for

us here was to have a sample comprising teachers who were low, intermediate, and high on the burnout and depression scales that we employed.

The study was conducted in accordance with ethical guidelines of the Declaration of Helsinki (World Medical Association, 2013). The participation in the study was entirely voluntary. A participant could stop completing the survey at any moment for any reason should he/she so choose. Full confidentiality was guaranteed to each participant. The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board of the University of Franche-Comté.

Measures

Burnout was assessed with the 14-item version of the Shirom-Melamed Burnout Measure (SMBM), one of the most widely used measures of burnout (Shirom & Melamed, 2006). The SMBM includes three subscales, emotional exhaustion (Cronbach's alpha = .82; sample item: "I feel I am unable to be sensitive to the needs of coworkers and students."), physical fatigue (Cronbach's alpha = .92; sample item: "I feel physically drained."), and cognitive weariness (Cronbach's alpha = .93; sample item: "My thinking process is slow."). The SMBM grades the frequency of burnout symptoms on a 1-7 scale, from *never* or *almost never* to *always* or *almost always*. The SMBM showed strong internal consistency in the present study (Cronbach's alpha = .95). In contrast to other popular measures of burnout such as the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI; Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996), the SMBM has been elaborated within a theory-driven approach to burnout (Shirom & Melamed, 2006) and is in the public domain. By allowing different facets of the depletion of workers' resources to be examined, the SMBM focuses on the putative core of burnout—exhaustion—the only characteristic that is common to all conceptualizations of the syndrome (Kristensen, Borritz, Villadsen, & Christensen, 2005).

Depression was assessed with the PHQ-9 (Kroenke & Spitzer, 2002; Cronbach's alpha = .84). The PHQ-9 is a dual-purpose instrument. First, it allows the investigator to grade the severity of depressive symptoms, based on a

4-point scale (from 0, for *not at all*, to 3, for *nearly every day*). Second, based on a dedicated algorithm (Kroenke & Spitzer, 2002), it allows the investigator to establish a provisional diagnosis of major depression in reference to the criteria provided in the DSM-5 (APA, 2013). The PHQ-9 algorithm notably takes into account the primacy of anhedonia (“Little interest or pleasure in doing things.”) and depressed mood (“Feeling down, depressed, or hopeless.”) in the characterization of major depression. When administered to a sample of 3,000 primary care patients, the PHQ-9 showed: (a) a sensitivity going from 86% with a cutoff score of 15, to more than 99% with a cutoff score of 10; (b) a specificity going from 91% with a cutoff score of 10, to more than 99% with a cutoff score of 15 (Kroenke & Spitzer, 2002). The PHQ-9 has been increasingly employed in depression research in the last decade.

Dysfunctional attitudes were assessed with the Dysfunctional Attitude Scale Short Form version 1 (DAS-SF1; Beevers, Strong, Meyer, Pilkonis, & Miller, 2007; Cronbach’s $\alpha = .87$). The DAS-SF1 comprises 9 items (e.g., “If I don’t set the highest standards for myself, I am likely to end up a second-rate person.”); its score range is 0-3 (from totally disagree to totally agree). Dysfunctional attitudes were assessed with the Dysfunctional Attitude Scale Short Form version 1 (DAS-SF1; Beevers et al., 2007; Cronbach’s $\alpha = .87$). The DAS-SF1 comprises 9 items (e.g., “If I don’t set the highest standards for myself, I am likely to end up a second-rate person.”); its score range is 0-3 (from *totally disagree* to *totally agree*).

Ruminative responses were assessed with the Ruminative Responses Scale refined version (RRS; Treynor, Gonzalez, & Nolen-Hoeksema, 2003; Cronbach’s $\alpha = .81$). The RRS comprises 10 items (e.g., “Think ‘What am I doing to deserve this?’”). Participants rated each questionnaire item on a scale from 1 (*almost never*) to 4 (*almost always*).

Pessimistic attributions were assessed with the Depressive Attributions Questionnaire (DAQ; Kleim, Gonzalo, & Ehlers, 2011; Cronbach’s $\alpha = .94$). The DAQ comprises 16 items; its

score range is 0-4 (from *not at all* to *very strongly*). The DAQ quantifies the internal (e.g., “When bad things happen, I think it is my fault.”), stable (e.g., “When bad things happen to me, I am sure it will happen again.”), and global (e.g., “When something bad happens, I think of the problems this will cause in all areas of my life.”) character of the respondent’s causal attributions regarding negative life events as well as the level of helplessness of the respondent (e.g., “I feel helpless when bad things happen.”).

A generic sociodemographic questionnaire was additionally administered, in which information regarding the participants’ sex, age, and length of employment was collected.

Data Analyses

Data were processed using correlation analysis, two-step cluster analysis—with burnout and depression as classification variables—, analysis of variance (ANOVA), and Tukey’s post-hoc test. By relying on such analyses, we were able to process data both dimensionally and categorically.

In order to examine the extent to which the burnout-depression correlation differed in strength from the correlation between the affective-cognitive and somatic symptoms of depression, we divided the PHQ-9 into two subscales. The affective-cognitive subscale combined items 1, 2, 6, 7, and 9 (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .76$). The somatic subscale combined items 3, 4, 5, and 8 (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .71$).

An aim of our categorical analyses was to specifically investigate the overlap of burnout with depression at the high end of the burnout continuum. Consistent with past research (Bianchi & Schonfeld, 2016; Schonfeld & Bianchi, 2016), we used a mean SMBM score of 5.5/7.0 as a cut-point to isolate participants with high frequencies of burnout symptoms. An SMBM score of 5.5/7.0 corresponds to burnout symptoms experienced on average more than “quite frequently.”

In order to identify the participants who were likely to be clinically depressed, we relied on the diagnostic algorithm of the PHQ-9 (see Kroenke & Spitzer, 2002; see also Bianchi,

Schonfeld, & Laurent, 2014). The strong psychometric properties of the PHQ-9 make it a relevant case-finding instrument in depression research (Kroenke & Spitzer, 2002).

Results

The correlations among the main study variables are displayed in Table 1. Burnout and depressive symptoms were strongly correlated ($r = .73$). When corrected for attenuation, the correlation reached .82. Burnout symptoms correlated .71 with the affective-cognitive and .62 with the somatic subscale of the PHQ-9. Depressive symptoms correlated .45 with the emotional exhaustion, .73 with the physical fatigue, and .68 with the cognitive weariness subscale of the SMBM. Burnout and depressive symptoms were each moderately correlated with dysfunctional attitudes, ruminative responses, and pessimistic attributions.

Of the 184 schoolteachers included in the study, 14 (about 8%) reported burnout symptoms at high frequencies (mean SMBM score ≥ 5.5). Each of these 14 schoolteachers was identified as clinically depressed based on the diagnostic algorithm of the PHQ-9. Of the 14 schoolteachers with high frequencies of burnout symptoms, 12 (about 86%) scored 15 or higher on the PHQ-9 (score range: 13-24), a score at which immediate initiation of pharmacotherapy and/or psychotherapy has been recommended (Kroenke & Spitzer, 2002). Suicidal ideation was reported by five (36%) of the schoolteachers with high frequencies of burnout symptoms.

Three distinct groups of teachers emerged from the cluster analysis (Figure 1), identifiable as “low burnout-depression” ($n = 56$; 30%), “medium burnout-depression” ($n = 82$; 45%), and “high burnout-depression” ($n = 46$; 25%). Burnout and depressive symptoms had similar weights in cluster construction. The silhouette measure of cohesion and separation indicated good cluster quality (values ranged between 0.50 and 1.00). ANOVAs and post-hoc tests (a) confirmed that the three groups differed from each other in terms of burnout ($F [2, 181] = 205.44, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.69$) and depressive ($F [2,$

181] = 304.09, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.77$) symptoms, (b) revealed that the three groups differed from each other in terms of dysfunctional attitudes ($F [2, 181] = 17.32, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.16$), ruminative responses ($F [2, 181] = 14.16, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.14$), and pessimistic attributions ($F [2, 181] =$

19.48, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.18$), and (c) showed that the three groups did not differ from each other in terms of sex, age or length of employment. The characteristics of the identified clusters are displayed in Table 2.

Discussion

The aim of the present study was to examine the overlap of burnout with depression in the New Zealand context. In order to do so, we relied on a sample of 184 schoolteachers. Schoolteachers have been assumed to be strongly affected by burnout (Maslach et al.,

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, and correlations between the main study variables ($N = 184$).

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
Burnout symptoms	—												
Depressive symptoms	.73	—											
Dysfunctional attitudes	.39	.49	—										
Ruminative responses	.37	.43	.45	—									
Pessimistic attributions	.47	.48	.63	.65	—								
Sex	.06	-.00	.09	-.04	.02	—							
Age	-.05	-.03	-.12	-.11	-.15	.00	—						
Length of employment	-.01	.00	-.04	-.06	-.13	-.04	.78	—					
BO-EE	.77	.45	.17	.23	.27	.13	.03	-.03	—				
BO-PF	.94	.73	.41	.35	.47	.00	-.07	.01	.59	—			
BO-CW	.93	.68	.40	.36	.47	.08	-.06	-.02	.63	.81	—		
DEP-AFF-COG	.71	.93	.47	.40	.49	.04	-.04	-.05	.48	.70	.66	—	
DEP-SOM	.62	.91	.43	.37	.38	-.05	-.00	.06	.35	.64	.58	.68	—
	3.64	8.84	1.20	2.21	1.19	0.23	43.13	15.28	2.91	4.12	3.51	3.96	4.88
	1.20	5.29	0.57	0.54	0.89	0.42	11.31	10.81	1.29	1.36	1.31	3.05	2.73

Notes—All correlations whose absolute value exceeds .13 are significant at $p < .05$ or less. Sex was coded 0 for women and 1 for men. M : mean; SD : standard deviation. BO-EE: emotional exhaustion dimension of burnout; BO-PF: physical fatigue dimension of burnout; BO-CW: cognitive weariness dimension of burnout; DEP-AFF-COG: affective-cognitive symptoms of depression; DEP-SOM: somatic symptoms of depression.

Figure 1. Cluster plot.

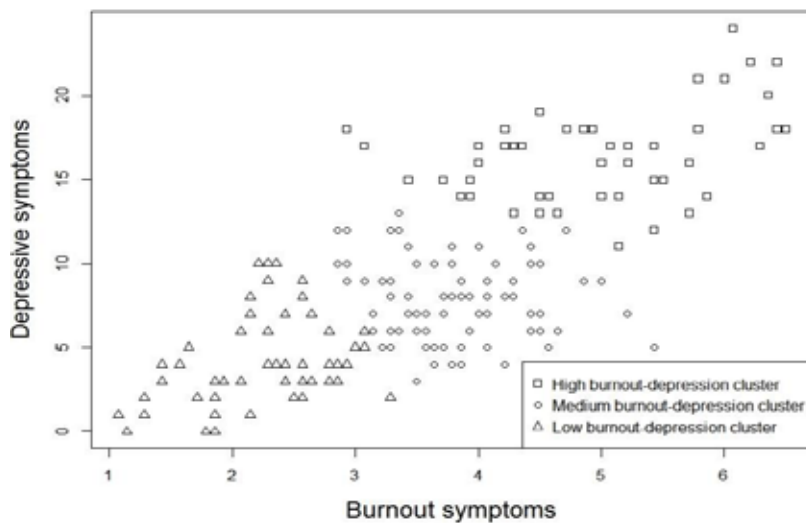


Table 2. Characteristics of the identified clusters.

	Cluster 1		Cluster 2		Cluster 3	
	Low burnout-depression		Medium burnout-depression		High burnout-depression	
	$n = 56$ (30%)		$n = 82$ (45%)		$n = 46$ (25%)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Burnout symptoms	2.31	0.54	3.82	0.56	4.96	0.93
Depressive symptoms	4.30	2.59	7.66	2.37	16.48	2.80
Dysfunctional attitudes	0.95	0.44	1.17	0.55	1.56	0.60
Ruminative responses	1.96	0.45	2.23	0.50	2.50	0.59
Pessimistic attributions	0.79	0.59	1.13	0.83	1.78	0.99
Sex	0.18	0.39	0.28	0.45	0.20	0.40
Age	44.64	12.40	41.59	11.26	44.02	9.82
Length of employment	14.64	12.04	15.46	10.87	15.74	9.20

Notes—Sex was coded 0 for women and 1 for men. M : mean; SD : standard deviation.

2001). Consistent with recent studies carried out in Europe and the U.S., we observed substantial overlap of burnout with depression.

First, we found a strong correlation between burnout and depressive symptoms ($r = .73$; disattenuated correlation: .82). Associations of such magnitudes are likely to be observed between different measures of the same construct. For example, Kung et al. (2013) reported correlations between the PHQ-9 and the Beck Depression Inventory-II of .81 in a sample of 287 outpatients and .67 in a sample of 338 inpatients. Shirom and Melamed (2006) reported correlations between the SMBM and the MBI-General Survey of .74 ($n = 198$) and .79 ($n = 236$) in two different groups of workers. In addition, burnout and depressive symptoms were found to be similarly correlated with dysfunctional attitudes, ruminative responses, and pessimistic attributions, three dispositional risk factors for depression (Alloy et al., 2006; Bianchi & Schonfeld, 2016; Michl et al., 2013; Mor & Winquist, 2002).

Second, our results showed that 100% of the schoolteachers exhibiting burnout symptoms at high frequencies met the criteria for a provisional diagnosis

of major depression. This finding is suggestive of a problematic overlap between burnout and depression—despite the small subsample involved ($n = 14$)—, in line with the results of recent European and U.S. studies. Burnout-depression overlaps of 90% and 86% were found by Bianchi et al. (2014) and Schonfeld and Bianchi (2016), respectively, in studies of French and U.S. schoolteachers. It should be underscored that burnout was assessed with the SMBM in Schonfeld and Bianchi's (2016) study and with the MBI in Bianchi et al.'s (2014) study. This suggests that burnout overlaps with depression regardless of whether it is assessed with the SMBM or the MBI. That 36% of the individuals presenting with high frequencies of burnout symptoms in our sample reported some degree of suicidal ideation underlines the severity of the burnout phenomenon and is of public health concern.

The profiles that emerged from our cluster analysis further suggested that burnout and depressive symptoms were grouped together in the affected individuals. Individuals with low levels of burnout symptoms reported low levels of depressive symptoms; individuals with medium levels of burnout symptoms reported medium levels of depressive symptoms; lastly, individuals with the highest levels of burnout symptoms were also the ones reporting the highest levels of depressive symptoms. Our results are consistent with the findings from two longitudinal studies conducted in Finland and France (Ahola et al., 2014; Bianchi et al., 2015b), in which burnout and depressive symptoms were found to increase or decrease in parallel over time, rendering the exclusion of burnout from the spectrum of depression unwarranted.

It has been suggested that burnout and depression cannot be viewed as one entity because of their limited common variance (Schaufeli & Enzmann, 1998; Toker & Biron, 2012). In the present study, we found that the correlation between burnout (as operationalized by the SMBM global score) and depression (as operationalized by the PHQ-9 global score)— $r = .73$ —was similar in strength to the correlation between the affective-cognitive and somatic symptoms of depression— $r = .68$. Given that the affective-cognitive and somatic symptoms of depression are considered

to form a unified entity with a correlation of .68, there is no obstacle to viewing burnout and depression as one entity with a correlation of .73.

The idea that burnout is distinct from depression still prevails among some researchers (e.g., Maslach & Leiter, 2016). It is worth noting, however, that more than 40 years after the introduction of the burnout construct in the research literature (see Maslach et al., 2001), the *rationale* underlying the burnout-depression distinction remains unclear. For instance, burnout has been hypothesized to be a product of unresolvable (job) stress. It turns out that unresolvable stress (either job-related or not) is known to play a key causal role in depression (Gilbert, 2006; Pryce et al., 2011; Willner et al., 2013). As an illustration, Pizzagalli (2014) noted: "...although severe stressors have been generally linked to increased risk of depression, chronic stressors and events characterized by perceived (a) lack of control, (b) inability to escape or resolve the aversive situation (e.g., entrapment), or (c) loss of status (e.g., humiliation) appear to be particularly depressogenic..." (p. 406). In a similar vein, according to Sapolsky (2004), "it is impossible to understand either the biology or psychology of major depressions without recognizing the critical role played in the disease by stress" (p. 271). In terms of etiology, it is hence very difficult to understand where the difference between burnout and depression is supposed to lie. It has been frequently suggested that burnout is singularized by its job-related character. However, this argument has been shown to be inapplicable given that (a) depression can be job-related as well and (b) the job-related character of a given condition is not nosologically discriminant in itself—a job-related depression remains a depression (Bianchi et al., 2015a, 2015c). In terms of the clinical picture, the distinctiveness of burnout is unfortunately not clearer. Burnout has actually been associated with *all* the symptoms of depression (Bianchi et al., 2015a; Schaufeli & Enzmann, 1998). As suggested by the present study, it is virtually impossible to find an individual with high frequencies of burnout symptoms who does not also present with the characteristics of clinical

depression. All in all, time may have come to define burnout as a depressive syndrome.

Arguably the "social focus" of burnout research (Maslach et al., 2001) contributed to directing the attention of investigators to the supra-individual factors influencing occupational health (e.g., organizational/managerial factors). *Switching from burnout to depression does not imply any neglect of such factors*. As previously emphasized, depressive syndromes have long been related to the experience of unresolvable (occupational) stress and understood within the framework of the interaction between the individual and his/her social environment. Work-related depression has been widely studied in recent years, resulting in strong recommendations regarding the enhancement of employees' working conditions (Adler et al., 2015; Blackmore et al., 2007; Melchior et al., 2007; Schwenk, 2015; Szeto & Dobson, 2013). In research settings, the relationship between depression and work can be established by examining the variance in depression respectively explained by occupational and non-occupational factors. This relationship can also be examined by questioning the extent to which employees *attribute* their depressive symptoms to their job (see Rydmark et al., 2006). In clinical settings, the investigation of the work-depression relationship is in fact integral part of the anamnesis conducted by the practitioner.

The study has at least four limitations. First, we assessed burnout using the SMBM, a measure of burnout that reflects an "exhaustion-only" view of burnout. However, other measures of burnout are available (e.g., the MBI) and should be tested in the future. Second, we identified likely cases of major depression using the PHQ-9, a self-report measure. Although the PHQ-9 has been specifically designed from a diagnostic perspective and shown to be well-suited for case-finding (Kroenke & Spitzer, 2002; Martin-Subero et al., in press), the method of reference for diagnosing depression is the clinical interview (APA, 2013). Third, our study was cross-sectional. This design only allowed us to provide a "snapshot" of the burnout-depression association; a diachronic view of how the two entities behaved toward one another was out of reach. Fourth, our

procedure of recruitment did not permit us to assess the representativeness of our sample with regard to the New Zealand schoolteacher population. This being said, we note with Kristensen (1995) that the issue of sample representativeness is of minor importance in analytical studies such as ours (as opposed to descriptive studies). What matters most in analytical studies is the availability of the variables of interest at various levels among the participants. This criterion was met in our study: the median scores were 7.50 for the PHQ-9, with observed scores ranging from 0 to 24, and 3.64 for the SMBM, with observed scores ranging from 1.07 to 6.50.

Given the success of the burnout label among both the scientific community and the public (Bianchi et al., 2016), clarifying the nosological status of the burnout syndrome has become an important topic in clinical psychology, occupational medicine, and psychiatry. To our knowledge, the present study is the first to address the issue of the burnout-depression association in the New Zealand context. Consistent with past research conducted in Europe and the U.S., we found evidence for an overlap of burnout with depression, both dimensionally and categorically. The fact that 100% of the schoolteachers at the high end of the burnout continuum reported clinical levels of depressive symptoms is particularly noteworthy. Overall, our findings support the view that burnout is part of the spectrum of depression. Thus, our results do not plead for an elevation of burnout to the status of (distinct) nosological entity. We recommend that burnout be parsimoniously defined as a depressive syndrome.

Conflicts of interest

The authors state that there are no conflicts of interest.

References

Adler, D. A., Lerner, D., Visco, Z. L., Greenhill, A., Chang, H., Cymerman, E., Rogers, W. H. (2015). Improving work outcomes of dysthymia (persistent depressive disorder) in an employed population. *General Hospital Psychiatry*, 37, 352-359.

Ahola K, Hakanen J, Perhoniemi R, et al. (2014) Relationship between

burnout and depressive symptoms: a study using the person-centred approach. *Burnout Research* 1: 29-37.

Ahola K, Kivimäki M, Honkonen T, Virtanen, M., Koskinen, S., Vahtera, J., & Lönnqvist, J. (2008) Occupational burnout and medically certified sickness absence: a population-based study of Finnish employees. *Journal of Psychosomatic Research* 64: 185-193.

Alloy LB, Abramson LY, Whitehouse WG, Hogan, M. E., Panzarella, C., & Rose, D. T. (2006) Prospective incidence of first onsets and recurrences of depression in individuals at high and low cognitive risk for depression. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* 115: 145-156.

American Psychiatric Association (2013) *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (5th ed.). Washington, DC: Author.

Beevers CG, Strong DR, Meyer B, et al. (2007) Efficiently assessing negative cognition in depression: an item response theory analysis of the Dysfunctional Attitude Scale. *Psychological Assessment* 19: 199-209.

Bianchi R and Laurent E (2015) Emotional information processing in depression and burnout: an eye-tracking study. *European Archives of Psychiatry and Clinical Neuroscience* 265: 27-34.

Bianchi R and Schonfeld IS (2016) Burnout is associated with a depressive cognitive style. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 100, 1-5.

Bianchi R, Schonfeld IS and Laurent E (2014) Is burnout a depressive disorder? A re-examination with special focus on atypical depression. *International Journal of Stress Management* 21: 307-324.

Bianchi R, Schonfeld IS and Laurent E (2015a) Burnout-depression overlap: a review. *Clinical Psychology Review* 36: 28-41.

Bianchi R, Schonfeld IS and Laurent E (2015b) Is it time to consider the "burnout syndrome" a distinct illness? *Frontiers in Public Health* 3:158.

Bianchi R, Schonfeld IS and Laurent E (2015c) Is burnout separable from depression in cluster analysis? A longitudinal study. *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology* 50: 1005-1011.

Bianchi R, Verkuilen J, Brisson R, Schonfeld IS, Laurent E. (2016) Burnout and depression: label-related stigma,

help-seeking, and syndrome overlap. *Psychiatry Research* 245: 91-98.

Blackmore, E. R., Stansfeld, S. A., Weller, I., Munce, S., Zagorski, B. M., & Stewart, D. E. (2007). Major depressive episodes and work stress: Results from a national population survey. *American Journal of Public Health*, 97, 2088-2093.

Bültmann U, Rugulies R, Lund T, et al. (2006) Depressive symptoms and the risk of long-term sickness absence. *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology* 41: 875-880.

Cuijpers P, Vogelzangs N, Twisk J, et al. (2014) Comprehensive meta-analysis of excess mortality in depression in the general community versus patients with specific illnesses. *American Journal of Psychiatry* 171: 453-462.

Gilbert P (2006) Evolution and depression: issues and implications. *Psychological Medicine* 36: 287-297.

Gosling SD, Vazire S, Srivastava S, et al. (2004) Should we trust web-based studies? A comparative analysis of six preconceptions about Internet questionnaires. *American Psychologist* 59: 93-104.

Hintsä T, Elovainio M, Jokela M, et al. (in press) Is there an independent association between burnout and increased allostatic load? Testing the contribution of psychological distress and depression. *Journal of Health Psychology*.

Hobfoll SE and Shirom A (2001) Conservation of resources theory: applications to stress and management in the workplace. In R.T. Golembiewski (Ed.), *Handbook of Organizational Behavior* (2nd ed., pp. 57-80). Marcel Dekker, New York, NY.

Jones SR, Fernyhough C, de Wit L, et al. (2008) A message in the medium? Assessing the reliability of psychopathology e-questionnaires. *Personality and Individual Differences* 44: 349-359.

Kessler RC, Berglund P, Demler O, et al. (2005) Lifetime prevalence and age-of-onset distributions of DSM-IV disorders in the National Comorbidity Survey Replication. *Archives of General Psychiatry* 62: 593-602.

Kleim B, Gonzalo D and Ehlers A (2011) The Depressive Attributions Questionnaire (DAQ): development of a short self-report measure of

- depressogenic attributions. *Journal of Psychopathology and Behavioral Assessment* 33: 375-385.
- Kristensen TS (1995) The demand-control-support model: methodological challenges for future research. *Stress Medicine* 11: 17-26.
- Kroenke K and Spitzer RL (2002) The PHQ-9: a new depression diagnostic and severity measure. *Psychiatric Annals* 32: 509-515.
- Kung S, Alarcon RD, Williams MD, et al. (2013) Comparing the Beck Depression Inventory-II (BDI-II) and Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9) depression measures in an integrated mood disorders practice. *Journal of Affective Disorders* 145: 341-343.
- Lerner D and Henke RM (2008) What does research tell us about depression, job performance, and work productivity? *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine* 50: 401-410.
- Lexis MAS, Jansen NWH, van Amelsvoort LGPM, et al. (2009) Depressive complaints as a predictor of sickness absence among the working population. *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine* 51: 887-895.
- Martin-Subero, M., Kroenke, K., Diez-Quevedo, C., Rangil, T., de Antonio, M., Morillas, R. M., . . . Navarro, R. (in press). Depression as measured by PHQ-9 versus clinical diagnosis as an independent predictor of long-term mortality in a prospective cohort of medical inpatients. *Psychosomatic Medicine*.
- Maslach, C., Jackson, S. E., & Leiter, M. P. (1996). *Maslach Burnout Inventory manual* (3rd ed.). Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologists Press.
- Maslach C and Leiter MP (2016) Understanding the burnout experience: recent research and its implications for psychiatry. *World Psychiatry* 15: 103-111.
- Maslach C, Schaufeli WB and Leiter MP (2001) Job burnout. *Annual Review of Psychology* 52: 397-422.
- Michl LC, McLaughlin KA, Shepherd K, et al. (2013) Rumination as a mechanism linking stressful life events to symptoms of depression and anxiety: longitudinal evidence in early adolescents and adults. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* 122: 339-352.
- Melchior, M., Caspi, A., Milne, B. J., Danese, A., Poulton, R., & Moffitt, T. E. (2007). Work stress precipitates depression and anxiety in young, working women and men. *Psychological Medicine*, 37, 1119-1129.
- Mor N and Winquist J (2002) Self-focused attention and negative affect: a meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin* 128: 638-662.
- New Zealand Ministry of Health (2012) *The Health of New Zealand Adults 2011/12: key findings of the New Zealand Health Survey*. Wellington, NZ: Author.
- Niedhammer I, Malard L and Chastang JF (2015) Occupational factors and subsequent major depressive and generalized anxiety disorders in the prospective French national SIP study. *BMC Public Health* 15: 200.
- Pizzagalli DA (2014) Depression, stress, and anhedonia: toward a synthesis and integrated model. *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology* 10: 393-423.
- Pryce CR, Azzinnari D, Spinelli S, et al. (2011) Helplessness: a systematic translational review of theory and evidence for its relevance to understanding and treating depression. *Pharmacology & Therapeutics* 132: 242-267.
- Rössler W, Hengartner M, Ajdacic-Gross V, et al. (2015) Predictors of burnout: results from a prospective community study. *European Archives of Psychiatry and Clinical Neuroscience* 265: 19-25.
- Rydmark, I., Wahlberg, K., Ghatan, P. H., Modell, S., Nygren, Å., Ingvar, M., . . . Heilig, M. (2006). Neuroendocrine, cognitive and structural imaging characteristics of women on longterm sickleave with job stress-induced depression. *Biological Psychiatry*, 60, 867-873.
- Sapolsky RM (2004) *Why zebras don't get ulcers* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: Holt Paperbacks.
- Schaufeli WB and Enzmann D (1998) *The burnout companion to study and practice: a critical analysis*. London, UK: Taylor & Francis.
- Schaufeli WB, Leiter MP and Maslach C (2009) Burnout: 35 years of research and practice. *Career Development International* 14: 204-220.
- Schonfeld IS (2001) Stress in 1st-year women teachers: the context of social support and coping. *Genetic, Social, and General Psychology Monographs* 127: 133-168.
- Schonfeld IS and Bianchi R (2016) Burnout and depression: two entities or one? *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 72: 22-37.
- Schwenk, T. L. (2015). Resident depression: The tip of a graduate medical education iceberg. *JAMA*, 314, 2357-2358.
- Shirom A and Melamed S (2006) A comparison of the construct validity of two burnout measures in two groups of professionals. *International Journal of Stress Management* 13: 176-200.
- Swider BW and Zimmerman RD (2010) Born to burnout: a meta-analytic path model of personality, job burnout, and work outcomes. *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 76: 487-506.
- Szeto, A. C. H., & Dobson, K. S. (2013). Mental disorders and their association with perceived work stress: An investigation of the 2010 Canadian Community Health Survey. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 18, 191-197.
- Toker S and Biron M (2012) Job burnout and depression: unraveling their temporal relationship and considering the role of physical activity. *Journal of Applied Psychology* 97: 699-710.
- Toker S, Melamed S, Berliner S, et al. (2012) Burnout and risk of coronary heart disease: a prospective study of 8838 employees. *Psychosomatic Medicine* 74: 840-847.
- Toppinen-Tanner S, Ojajärvi A, Väänänen A, et al. (2005) Burnout as a predictor of medically certified sick-leave absences and their diagnosed causes. *Behavioral Medicine* 31: 18-32.
- Treynor W, Gonzalez R and Nolen-Hoeksema S (2003) Rumination reconsidered: a psychometric analysis. *Cognitive Therapy and Research* 27: 247-259.
- Wang J (2005) Work stress as a risk factor for major depressive episode(s). *Psychological Medicine* 35: 865-871.
- Willner, P., Scheel-Krüger, J., & Belzung, C. (2013). The neurobiology of depression and antidepressant action. *Neuroscience & Biobehavioral Reviews*, 37, 2331-2371.

World Health Organization (2016)
The ICD-10 classification of mental and behavioural disorders: clinical descriptions and diagnostic guidelines. Geneva, Switzerland: Author.

World Medical Association (2013)
World Medical Association Declaration of Helsinki: ethical principles for medical research involving human subjects. *JAMA: The Journal of the American Medical Association* 310: 2191-2194.

Wurm W, Vogel K, Holl A, et al. (2016) Depression-burnout overlap in physicians. *PLoS ONE* 11: e0149913.

Corresponding Author

Renzo Bianchi
University of Neuchâtel,
Institute of Work and Organizational
Psychology,
Émile-Argand 11,
2000 Neuchâtel,
Switzerland
renzo.bianchi@unine.ch