

Chronic Occupational Stress Does Not Discriminate Burnout From Depression

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Introduction. It has been assumed that a key difference between burnout and depression is that burnout is job-related and situation-specific whereas depression is context-free and pervasive. This view has recently been challenged at a theoretical level and additional empirical investigation has been called for.

Objectives. The aim of this study was to examine whether chronic occupational stress—the putative cause of burnout—discriminated burnout from depression. Following a scope-based approach to the burnout-depression distinction, chronic occupational stress should be primarily related to burnout and only to a lesser degree to depression. This hypothesis was tested.

Methods. A total of 2124 French teachers took part in this study (mean age: 41.36; 73% female) during the last trimester of the 2013-2014 school year. Burnout was assessed with the Maslach Burnout Inventory and depression with the 9-item depression module of the Patient Health Questionnaire. The Effort-Reward Imbalance Questionnaire short form (ERIQ) was used for assessing chronic occupational stress.

Results. Burnout and depression were almost identically correlated to effort-reward imbalance at work. Interestingly, the job over-commitment component of the ERIQ was slightly more correlated to depression than to burnout. Multiple regression analyses showed that effort-reward imbalance at work and job over-commitment predicted depression as much as burnout, controlling for gender, age, and length of employment.

Conclusions. Chronic occupational stress was not found to discriminate burnout from depression. These results further question the relevance of a scope-based distinction between burnout and depression and supports the idea that burnout overlaps with depression.