

**RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BURNOUT SYNDROME AND COPING
STRATEGIES IN UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS IN MEXICO**

**RELACIÓN ENTRE EL SÍNDROME DE BURNOUT Y LAS ESTRATEGIAS DE
AFRONTAMIENTO EN DOCENTES UNIVERSITARIOS DE MÉXICO**

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ABSTRACT

University teaching takes place in work contexts that can generate high levels of stress and professional exhaustion, a situation that has intensified following the educational transformations derived from the COVID-19 pandemic. These conditions increase the risk of Burnout Syndrome. The objective of this study was to analyze the relationship between Burnout Syndrome and Coping Strategies among university professors at the Faculty of Economics, Accounting, and Administration of the Universidad Juárez del Estado de Durango (UJED). A non-experimental, descriptive, correlational, and cross-sectional design was used, with a sample of 80 professors selected through intentional non-probabilistic sampling. Statistical analysis included descriptive statistics, normality tests, correlation, and the Mann-Whitney U test. Two validated instruments were applied: the Brief Burnout Questionnaire (CBB) and the Modified Coping Strategies Scale (EEC-M). Results indicated low levels of burnout in the sample (general mean = 2.34, prevalence of 37.47%), with a negative and moderate correlation between burnout and the use of coping

strategies ($r = -0.395$, $p < .01$). The most frequently used strategies were positive reappraisal and problem-focused coping, while emotional confrontation was the least frequent. It is concluded that strengthening active coping strategies can contribute to the prevention and reduction of burnout among university faculty.

KEYWORDS: professional exhaustion; work stress; psychological well-being; university professors

RESUMEN

La docencia universitaria se desarrolla en contextos laborales que pueden generar altos niveles de estrés y desgaste profesional, situación que se ha intensificado tras las transformaciones educativas derivadas de la pandemia por COVID-19; estas condiciones incrementan el riesgo de Síndrome de Burnout. El presente estudio tuvo como objetivo analizar la relación entre el Síndrome de Burnout y las Estrategias de Afrontamiento en docentes universitarios de la Facultad de Economía, Contaduría y Administración de la Universidad Juárez del Estado de Durango (UJED). Se utilizó un diseño no experimental, descriptivo, correlacional y transversal, con una muestra de 80 docentes seleccionados mediante muestreo no probabilístico intencional. El análisis estadístico incluyó estadística descriptiva, pruebas de normalidad, correlación y prueba U de Mann-whitney. Se aplicaron dos instrumentos validados: el Cuestionario Breve de Burnout (CBB) y la Escala de Estrategias de Coping-Modificada (EEC-M). Los resultados indicaron niveles bajos de burnout en la muestra (media general = 2.34, prevalencia del 37.47%), con una correlación negativa y moderada entre el burnout y el uso de Estrategias de Afrontamiento ($r = -0.395$, $p < .01$). Las estrategias más utilizadas fueron la reevaluación positiva y el afrontamiento centrado en el problema, mientras que la confrontación emocional fue la menos frecuente. Se concluye que el fortalecimiento de estrategias de afrontamiento activas puede contribuir a la prevención y reducción del Burnout en el profesorado universitario.

PALABRAS CLAVE: desgaste profesional; estrés laboral; bienestar psicológico; profesores universitarios

INTRODUCTION

Burnout Syndrome (hereinafter BS) is a psychosocial phenomenon of growing relevance in the workplace, especially in professions involving high human contact, such as teaching. Initially defined by Freudenberger (1974) as a state of fatigue and frustration resulting from excessive dedication without equivalent emotional reward, the concept has evolved toward a multidimensional conception that includes emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). The World Health Organization (1970) recognizes it as an occupational phenomenon associated with chronic work stress.

According to Acuña & Bruschi (2014), this syndrome, also referred to as burnout syndrome, makes its appearance when the professional or individual is «burned out», implying that the situation (family, social, or work-related) has overwhelmed them and their adaptive capacity has been reduced.

In the Mexican educational context, teacher burnout has been aggravated by structural factors such as work overload, lack of institutional resources, accelerated digital transformations, and, more recently, the exceptional demands derived from the COVID-19 pandemic (Álvarez et al., 2022; Nova, 2020). Previous studies indicate that Mexico presents one of the highest levels of work stress globally, with severe implications for the mental health of teaching staff (Rodríguez, Guevara & Viramontes, 2017).

In response to this scenario, Coping Strategies (hereinafter CS) emerge as cognitive and behavioral resources for managing stress and preventing professional exhaustion. Lazarus & Folkman (1986) define them as dynamic efforts to manage external and internal demands appraised as exceeding personal resources. In teachers, the predominant use of problem-focused strategies or positive reappraisal is associated with lower levels of burnout, while avoidant or emotion-focused strategies may exacerbate it (Gil & Peiró, 2000; Krzemien, 2007).

Despite the abundant international literature, research gaps persist in Latin American contexts, particularly in Mexican public higher education (Dipp et al., 2011). There is a need for empirical studies that integrate theoretical models such as the systemic-cognitive model (Barraza, 2008) and that examine the interaction between work factors, personal resources and coping strategies in specific teacher samples.

This article aims to analyze the relationship between Burnout Syndrome and Coping Strategies among university professors at the Faculty of Economics, Accounting and Administration of the UJED. The findings seek to provide local evidence for the design of institutional interventions oriented toward teacher well-being.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A non-experimental, descriptive-correlational and cross-sectional design was employed. This approach allowed the observation of variables in their natural context without deliberate manipulation, collecting data at a single point in time (Hernández et al., 2014).

The target population consisted of full-time and part-time professors at the Faculty of Economics, Accounting and Administration of the UJED. Inclusion criteria were: being an active professor with at least one year of seniority and agreeing to participate voluntarily. Personnel on extended leave or with less than six months of service were excluded.

Sampling was non-probabilistic and intentional. Sample size was calculated using G*Power software for a bivariate correlation test, with a medium effect size ($r = .30$), significance level $\alpha = .05$, and statistical power of 80% ($1-\beta = .80$), obtaining a minimum of 80 participants.

Finally, 80 professors participated, with a gender distribution of 57.5% women ($n = 46$) and 42.5% men ($n = 34$). The average age was 43.22 years ($SD = 9.67$) for women and 46.65 years ($SD = 11.79$) for men. The sample guarantees the reliability of the results and allows for generalization within the university educational context.

Instruments

1. Brief Burnout Questionnaire (CBB): developed by Moreno et al. (2005), evaluates three dimensions of burnout: emotional exhaustion (items 1, 7, 15), depersonalization (items 3, 11, 18) and personal accomplishment (items 5, 12, 19). It consists of 21 items with a 5-point Likert response (1 = Never, 5 = Always). In this study, the block corresponding to the syndrome (9 items) was used. The obtained reliability was $\alpha = .76$.

2. Modified Coping Strategies Scale (EEC-M): Adaptation of the scale by Lazarus & Folkman (1986) validated by Londoño et al. (2006). It evaluates 40 items grouped into dimensions such as problem-focused coping, positive reappraisal, seeking social support, escape-avoidance and emotional confrontation. The scale is 6 Likert-type points (1 = Never, 6 = Always). Reliability in this study was $\alpha = .74$.

Procedure

Institutional authorization was requested and informed consent was applied to each participant, guaranteeing confidentiality and exclusive use for academic purposes. The questionnaires were distributed in printed and online formats between January and March 2024. Data collection was carried out over a period of four weeks.

Data analysis

Data were processed using SPSS v.26 software. Descriptive analyses (frequencies, means, standard deviations) were performed to characterize the sample and study variables. Normality was assessed using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests. Given that some variables did not meet the normality assumption, non-parametric tests were used. The correlation between burnout and coping strategies was analyzed using Spearman's correlation coefficient. The significance level was set at $p < .05$.

Ethical considerations

The study adheres to the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki (World Medical Association, 2025) and national regulations on research involving human subjects. Anonymity, confidentiality and the right to withdraw at any time without consequences were ensured.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Sociodemographic characteristics of the sample

The sample (N = 80) was predominantly composed by professors with a permanent position (77.5%), part-time appointment (85%) and master's degree level of education (63.7%). The average teaching seniority was 12.93 years for women and 16.47 years for men. Forty-seven percent worked the morning shift, 37.8% the afternoon shift and 15.2% both shifts.

Levels of Burnout Syndrome

The global burnout score presented a mean of 2.34 (SD = 0.73) on a scale of 1 to 5, which corresponds to a low level according to the scale of Mingote & Pérez (2003). The overall prevalence of burnout was 37.47%.

The dimensions are shown in the following table:

Dimension	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Burnout Level
Emotional exhaustion	1.73	0.56	Low
Depersonalization/Cynicism	2.25	0.61	Moderate
Lack of personal accomplishment	2.86	0.73 Moderate	Moderate

Table 1. Burnout levels by dimension (Source: Own elaboration)

The item with the highest frequency was: «When I review my life story, I am happy with how things have turned out» (M = 4.23, SD = 0.99), indicating life satisfaction as a protective factor. The item with the lowest frequency was: «The work I do is far from what I would have wanted» (M = 1.49, SD = 0.69), suggesting low vocational frustration.

Most frequently used coping strategies

Those recommended by Barbosa et al. (2014); Valadez, Bravo & Vaquero (2011); and Pérez (2021) were considered. The global mean of coping strategy use was 3.44 (SD = 0.58). The most frequent strategies were (see Table 2):

Coping Strategy	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Positive reappraisal	4.67	1.16
Problem-focused coping	4.06	1.12
Seeking social support	3.53	1.34
Escape-avoidance	3.14	1.28
Emotional/aggressive confrontation	1.66	0.84

Table 2. Most frequently used coping strategies by professors (Source: Own elaboration)

Correlation between Burnout and Coping Strategies

A negative and moderate correlation was found between the total burnout score and the global use of coping strategies ($r = -0.395$, $p < .01$). This indicates that greater use of coping strategies is associated with lower levels of burnout.

Analysis by dimensions:

- Emotional exhaustion correlated negatively with positive reappraisal ($r = -0.433$, $p < .01$) and problem-focused coping ($r = -0.343$, $p < .01$).

- Depersonalization showed a positive correlation with avoidance strategies ($r = 0.304$, $p < .01$) and a negative correlation with social support ($r = -0.333$, $p < .01$).
- Lack of personal accomplishment was negatively associated with positive reappraisal ($r = -0.662$, $p < .01$) and positively associated with difficulty solving problems ($r = 0.368$, $p < .01$).

Comparative analysis by sociodemographic variables

No significant differences were found in burnout levels by gender, age or teaching seniority ($p > .05$); however, professors with a permanent position showed lower emotional exhaustion than temporary professors ($U = 512$, $p = .032$). There were also no significant differences in the use of coping strategies according to educational level or type of appointment.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study reveal that university professors at FECA-UJED present low levels of burnout in its emotional exhaustion dimension, but moderate levels in depersonalization and lack of personal accomplishment (Barraza, 2025). These findings coincide with previous research in similar contexts that report prevalences between low and moderate.

The predominant coping profile, focused on positive reappraisal and active problem-solving, reflects adaptive psychological resources that act as buffers (dampers) against work stress. This is consistent with the postulates of Lazarus & Folkman (1986) and with studies identifying these strategies as protective against burnout (González et al., 2023; Pérez, 2021). The low frequency of emotional confrontation suggests an adequate interpersonal climate and emotional regulation skills in the sample.

The moderate negative correlation between burnout and coping corroborates the central hypothesis of the study and coincides with international evidence (Schaufeli & Enzmann, 2020). However, the modest magnitude of this relationship suggests that other factors such as organizational conditions, administrative workload or institutional support also mediate the onset of the

syndrome, as proposed by Barraza's (2008) systemic-cognitive model. The absence of significant differences by gender or age contrasts with some studies that report greater vulnerability in women and younger teachers (Nova, 2020). This could be due to specific characteristics of the sample or a homogenization of work demands in the post-pandemic context. The lower presence of burnout in professors with permanent positions highlights the stabilizing role of job security (International Labour Organization, 2021).

Among the study's limitations are the cross-sectional design, which prevents inferring causality; the non-probabilistic sampling, which limits generalizability; and possible social desirability in responses. Nevertheless, the adequate reliability levels of the instruments and methodological rigor strengthen internal validity.

University professors at FECA-UJED present low overall levels of Burnout Syndrome, with a predominance of low emotional exhaustion and moderate depersonalization. The most frequently used Coping Strategies are positive reappraisal and problem-focused coping, while emotional confrontation is the least frequent. There is a negative and moderate correlation between burnout level and the use of coping strategies, confirming that a greater repertoire of adaptive strategies is associated with lower professional exhaustion. Institutional factors such as job stability (permanent position) appear to exert an additional protective effect on teacher well-being. It is recommended to implement training programs in coping skills, foster social support networks among peers, and optimize working conditions to prevent the worsening of burnout, especially in its cynicism dimension.

CONCLUSIONS

This study provides local empirical evidence for the design of occupational health policies in Mexican higher education institutions, highlighting the importance of integrating individual approaches (strengthening personal resources) and organizational approaches (improving the work environment) into intervention strategies. Institutional policies based on the results of this study can play an essential role in preventing burnout and fostering healthy coping strategies,

which will contribute to teacher well-being, improve the work environment and enhance educational quality.

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