

Burnout and Birth Order: A Transactional Analysis Perspective

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Abstract

People of all ages can experience burnout now at work. Many teens as well as young adults do it, especially when around friends. A lot of the stress also can cause it as well. Researchers extensively examined burnout as a phenomenon involving emotional tiredness, and they diminished motivation. However, they have not focused sufficiently upon how familial roles and personality attributes influence its manifestation. From integrating Adler's birth order concepts with Berne's Transactional Analysis framework, this research examines burnout from a theoretical perspective. According to Adler, whether a child is eldest, middle, or youngest, family position influences self-perception and worldview greatly. Berne explained personality using Parent, Adult, and Child ego states. These views show us more about people prone to burnout. The Parent ego may in fact largely affect the older children's lives because they often can have a lot of the responsibility. Demands that are high face them at this time. Fatigue in addition to rigidity can in the end result. Relationships of middle kids may battle mixing adult thought with kid-like agreement. Since the younger brothers are more spontaneous as well as carefree, they may depend on Free Child features that can become avoidance strategies when they are anxious. This study shows these connections then proposes therapeutic approaches that emphasise ego state awareness plus the modification of life scripts, so they may lower the risk of burnout among youth.

Keywords: burnout, birth order, transactional analysis, India

Introduction

Most people think of burnout as being emotionally drained at work, but more and more young people are showing indications of it too. Maslach and Jackson (1981) were the first to talk



about burnout as a mix of being exhausted, losing touch with other people, and not feeling like you've accomplished anything. Researchers have discovered that similar symptoms occur not just in working adults but also in adolescents and college students (Schaufeli et al., 2002; Salmela-Aro et al., 2008). Because of all the homework, what their parents want of them, and social media, a lot of students feel fatigued, lonely, and doubtful of their skills.

It helps to look at ancient notions about personality to understand why different people are weak to different things. In 1927, Alfred Adler believed that the order in which people are born had a substantial impact on how they develop their personalities. The firstborn usually become leaders and perfectionists, the middleborn learn how to be flexible negotiators, and the youngest brothers are more free, lively, and occasionally needy. Subsequent reviews questioned just how large these differences are (Ernst & Angst, 1983, Harris, 2006), but the theory remains useful in clarifying how family relationships shape coping strategies.

Transactional Analysis (Berne, 1961) is another perspective that can be beneficial. TA divides personality into three parts: the Parent, the Adult, and the Child. The Parent ego is made up of rules and ideas that originate from adults. The Adult ego is all about logic and making choices. The Child ego is all about feelings, creativity, and formative experiences. People's beliefs, actions, and reactions to stress are believed to be fixed throughout childhood and persist until adolescence (Stewart & Joines, 1987).

Combining Adler's and Berne's concepts gives us a new way to think about burnout. The Parent ego may be highly essential for an oldest child who has a lot of obligations and great hopes. This could make individuals more inclined to get weary as the work load gets heavier. People who were born in the middle may feel overwhelmed when they switch between Adult rationality and Adapted Child compliance. This could make individuals more likely to get tired of being around other people or in relationships. The youngest child may focus too much on features that make them free and expressive as a Free Child. When they are stressed, this can make them stay away from it or handle it in the incorrect way.

This study constructs a theoretical model linking birth order to ego states to illustrate various pathways by which burnout may occur. There is also talk about how therapy could help young people notice these patterns and learn better ways to handle stress.

Purpose and significance of the present study:

This study seeks to investigate burnout in adolescents via uniting two recognized psychological models. Inspired by Alfred Adler's theory of birth order and Eric Berne's Transactional Analysis, the study examines how the order in which a teenager was born in relation to their siblings relates to their dominant ego state during stress. By combining the two theories, the paper proposes a fresh take on understanding burnout in youth. Even an oldest child has quite a strong Parent ego and also might set unrealistically high standards for themselves, which then leads to exhaustion, whereas even a youngest child has a Free Child orientation and also may cope simply because they avoid any stress. Theoretical integration is also relevant since most of the studies researched environmental stressors when trying to establish what factors contribute to burnout, but they have "insufficient focus" on how family role and personality factors then influence burnout.

The model also identifies new susceptibility factors for adolescent stress, including the role of the family in thought-feeling-behavior patterns, and young people's perceptions of the potential for stressors, e.g., the personality of an oldest child may be predisposed to perfectionism. This recognition may mean that they are particularly prone to the emotional exhaustion aspect of burnout. From this perspective, focused actions are suggested: therapists could help at-risk adolescents build resilience, revise rigid expectations, and become aware of their ego states and life scripts. In sum, this study's contribution lies within proposing a theoretical model connecting family birth order with TA ego states. The study thereby advances our comprehension of adolescent burnout risk also informs more personalized prevention strategies.

Statement of problem:

Burnout has customarily been studied in adult work environments yet similar symptoms (emotional exhaustion, detachment, reduced efficacy) also affect high-achieving students under academic and social pressures, evidence shows. Even so, existing research rarely examines how familial role structures combine alongside personality traits since burnout risk is influenced. Almost none of the studies do explicitly link a youth's birth order position to stress vulnerability. Also, the dominant TA ego state is not linked to stress vulnerability by them. In other words, it is the case that we lack knowledge of just how birth order might predispose



someone to a response to stress. This response can lead to burnout for someone. This study addresses the core issue of the underexplored connection between sibling roles and ego-state-driven coping. Filling this gap might explain why some adolescents become burned out under pressure while others cope more smoothly.

Objectives

To examine just how adolescents' personality development and their coping styles are influenced through Adlerian birth order positions like firstborn, middle, or youngest. How firstborns respond to stress may be shaped by leadership responsibilities along with a striving for success, for example.

Assess the way TA ego states work in adolescent stress responses and relate to burnout risk. The TA framework suggests that a person during stress may over-rely on one ego state like the Critical Parent ego driving perfectionism or the Free Child ego favoring avoidance. This kind of over-reliance can affect just how easily they may burn out.

A model that is unified for explaining pathways toward burnout of youth should integrate factors of birth order in addition to ego-state. In this model, an individual's sibling position links with a dominant ego state (e.g., firstborns with a strong Parent ego) then these ego-state tendencies, in turn, influence toward burnout symptoms.

For study of the ways these dynamics manifest themselves in adolescent burnout experiences. This does include an examination of core burnout features. Do students undergo exhaustion, disengagement, or diminished accomplishment regarding their family role and ego-state profile?

Review of Literature

Burnout: A Multidimensional Perspective

The term "burnout" initially referred to the fatigue experienced by individuals in high-demand professions, such as educators and medical practitioners (Freudenberger, 1974). Maslach and Jackson (1981) subsequently developed a paradigm encompassing emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and diminished achievement. Initially, "burnout" was perceived as exclusively impacting professionals; however, research rapidly shown that students are equally

susceptible, particularly within academic environments. Schaufeli et al. (2002) conducted a study that revealed student stress parallels workplace burnout. Salmela-Aro et al. (2008) discovered that adolescents experiencing burnout are more prone to depression and decreased productivity. Walburg observed in 2014 that academic burnout has long-lasting repercussions on mental health, such as making people worry more and feel worse about themselves. These results illustrate that burnout doesn't simply happen at work; it can happen anywhere when the expectations are greater than the resources, especially throughout the teenage years.

The Order of Birth and Personality

Adler proposed in 1927 that a child's birth order influences their personality by altering their proficiency in performing familial responsibilities. In the past, parents only cared about their oldest child. That kid often grows up to be a responsible leader, but they could also become a perfectionist. Kids that are in the middle of their friends typically learn how to acquire what they want or grow more self-sufficient. The youngest child is frequently spoiled, but they are also nice, amusing, and sometimes needy. Some of these assertions have received partial validation from research. Paulhus, Trapnell, and Chen (1999) discovered that firstborn children exhibited greater responsibility and motivation to succeed, whereas later-born children shown increased openness. Sulloway (1996) has argued that later-born children are more rebellious and creative particularly with respect to challenging authority, although not all studies have supported this. For example, small differences between first- and later-born children have been noted by Ernst and Angst (1983), and Harris (2006). However, it has been suggested that it is still possible to use a birth order framework to show how family events can affect how one problem-solves.

Ego States and Transactional Analysis

TA (Transactional Analysis) is a theory of social interaction, communication and personality suggested by Eric Berne in 1961 that helps people understand how they talk to one another. TA identifies three personality types: Parent, Adult and Child (PAC model). The Parent state is based on what you learnt from adults, the Adult state is based on what you see and think now, and the Child state is based on how you feel, play, and recall things from when you were younger. These ego states influence interpersonal interactions and problem-solving throughout one's life. Stewart and Joines (1987) asserted that Transactional Analysis (TA) is crucial for



comprehending stress responses, as individuals frequently revert to a singular ego state during periods of significant stress. Tudor (2014) elucidated that these ego states become increasingly prominent during adolescence as the process of identity formation accentuates the equilibrium (or absence thereof) among them.

Birth Order and Ego States Correlate with Burnout

Not many studies have looked explicitly at how birth order affects TA ego states, but the links are evident in theory. Because their parents have high standards and they have to live up to them, firstborns may develop a strong Critical Parent ego. They may also develop a perfectionist compulsion to put everything right, which can be exhausting. People born in the midway between the Adult way of thinking and Adapted Child obedient state. This results in role conflict and relationship fatigue. The younger brothers, who generally exemplify the younger, more energetic fun children, may take on the characteristics of a free child when anxious, and may tend to avoid. Further studies have shown the same thing with perfectionism (in Flett & Hewitt, 2002). In another study, Ziv and Hermel (2011) found that the middle-born have greater separation and individuation, thus, they find jobs more stressful.

How to Use It for Therapy

These links are useful to know about in the therapy context. Berne saw in 1966 that people often stick to the life scripts they learnt as kids, even though they can change them. Teenagers can use TA-based therapy to understand out which ego states are affecting their behaviour and adjust it to be more helpful. For firstborns, this could mean lessening their need for perfection. For middle children, it could mean finding a way to be both an adult and a child. For the youngest brothers, it could mean coming up with ways to deal with things rather than ignoring them. Counselling that looks at both family roles and how the ego works can help teens and young adults avoid and recover from burnout.

Theoretical Framework

You should look at the theories that support this model if you want to know how burnout could be related to birth order and ego states. Adler's theory of birth order is the first building block. He stated that a child's family constitutes their initial social group, and that a child's circumstances influence their acquisition of responsibility, identity, and stress management



(Adler, 1927). For instance, Paulhus, Trapnell, and Chen's (1999) research indicated that firstborns are often highly motivated to achieve success, whereas later-borns may exhibit greater openness and adaptability in their cognitive processes. Family roles do affect how people deal with their responsibilities in this way.

Transactional Analysis (Berne, 1961) is the basis for the second base. Berne discussed psychology through three ego states: Parent, Adult, and Child. We develop these emotions while we are young, and they continue with us when we interact with people and deal with stress. Stewart and Joines (1987) stated that individuals under significant stress often depend on a certain ego state more than others. This makes them act differently. For example, the Critical Parent's ego can make someone a perfectionist, whereas a Free Child who is too busy can make someone avoid things.

This paper provides a model by combining these two principles together: The path from birth order to burnout traverses the dominating ego state. Firstborns may feel a strong connection to the Parent ego since they are responsible and have high standards. This can make them want to be perfect and tired. Middle children need adults to reassure and protect them.

obedience to help them balance their duties better, making their relationships stressful. The youngest of the young ones might depend on Free Child spontaneity, can become avoidance coping when they're worried. This is consistent with the literature on avoidant coping perfectionism and stress (Flett & Hewitt, 2002), consistent with previous research by Ziv and Hermel (2011) that middle-born individuals may have unique challenges as compared to first- or individuality. These theories suggest that stress may be caused by internal stimuli as well also come from family roles and personal structures.

Discussion

Burnout is blamed on modern society however family variables and personality traits are actually associated with vulnerability. For example, perfectionists were more likely to feel emotionally exhausted than non-perfectionists in a study of stress and adolescents (Flett & Hewitt, 2002). From this study, it appears according to theory that the perfectionists are more likely to be the oldest children, which fits the theory that these individuals are more likely to

get exhausted when they cannot reach a particular standard because they possess the Critical Parent ego.

The people who are in between often take the role of a peacemaker. But they may be going through something too. They are the adult half and can analyze and logicalize things, but the child half needs constant encouragement. This is why they tire out easily when around other people. Middle children are said to be independent and have a harder time making friends and figuring out their identity (Ziv & Hermel, 2011). Middle children also can be burned out easier than firstborn and youngest children, due to needing independence from their parents.

Most often, the youngest kids are the spontaneous, playful, and fun ones, but they might not be able to manage the stress for long and may delay or go off and do dangerous things if they're leaning on Free Child traits. Walburg (2014) wrote that when teenagers are burned out in school, they feel lonely and have low self-regard, which is similar to the youngest kid's avoidance of activities.

In this light, however, it has been suggested that burnout is not the same for each child. It is, in fact, dependent on the ego states to which the child has access, as well as the role positions which the child has taken in the family. This broadens the view beyond the more common view that burnout is an externally influenced phenomenon, to a view that the way in which personality is formed as children can prepare them either to deal with stress or to be prone to stress.

Implications

For Counselling and Therapy

Some theories suggest a connection between birth order, ego states, and stress. These principles teach us a lot of crucial things. TA techniques can assist clients figure out which ego states are most essential in how they deal with stress in therapy and counselling. In 1966, Berne said that people frequently stick to the plans they set as kids, but they can revise them. For example, firstborns may want assistance in relinquishing their pursuit of perfection, middleborns may need guidance in reconciling their adult and child roles, and youngest children may benefit from strategies to manage stress more effectively.

For Schools and Teachers



Research such as Salmela-Aro et al. (2008) indicates that adolescent burnout is associated with feelings of melancholy and academic underachievement. To put it another way, schools need to do something to stop this from happening. Teachers and school counsellors can learn to recognise stress patterns that are related to personality and family responsibilities. They can then give emotional support and teach students how to be strong.

For Families

Parents might not know that putting too much pressure on the oldest child, ignoring the middle child, or indulging the youngest child might impact how they deal with stress in a way that lasts. Ziv and Hermel's (2011) research on the identity formation of middle-born children underscores the significance of providing equitable attention to each sibling. Being aware can help families educate their kids better ways to handle stress.

For Future Research

The majority of burnout research have been conducted in industrial or educational settings (Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Schaufeli et al., 2002). Researchers may utilise empirical data in the future to evaluate this notion by examining birth order and TA ego states as predictive factors. This would add greater depth to burnout models.

Suggestions

For Therapists and Counselors: Use TA-based life-script work to address burnout tendencies. Therapists should help adolescents spot ego-state patterns from birth order like a firstborn's perfectionist Parent script plus change scripts. Based on this, the oldest child might achieve perfectionism more easily, while the middle children can balance their Adult rationality with their Child need for approval. Teachers can teach the youngest children to cope instead of avoid. Since therapies expand ego-state options, they also loosen ego-state rigidity. Thus, both these effects reduce burnout through revised scripts.

Educators as well as Schools - should implement school-based burnout prevention strategies, taking personality and family influences into consideration. Teachers and school counselors can be trained so they identify the warning signs of birth-order burnout configurations as they exhibit those signs in the classroom, such as the over-pressured oldest child or identity confused middle child. Students can cope through resilience workshops or counseling groups that inform

them on how their birth order configuration affects them and how to cope with it. For example, in instances when someone helps perfectionist students set more realistic goals or when one provides some extra social support for teens caught between a childlike dependence and adult responsibilities. Focused actions for students may manage academic and social stress. These interventions can avert burnout.

Parents and also Families - must educate themselves in regard to balanced expectations. This applies for each child. Parents can often unknowingly reinforce stress-prone roles since they pressure the eldest for perfection, overlook the middle child, or spoil the youngest one. Since parents are aware of birth-order effects (as noted by Ziv & Hermel, 2011), this awareness may encourage parents to give to each child equal attention and support. For instance, encourage open discussion so middle children feel valued in discussion. Also, reduce that “superkid” pressure, which is weighing on eldest siblings. Families are able to reduce all of the long-term stress patterns contributing to adolescent burnout through helping each child to build adaptive coping skills in addition to adjusting expectations.

Researchers - can test this model by data Empirical data is useful also to refine this model. Birth-order information as well as adolescents’ predominant ego states like those using TA inventories plus burnout symptoms need to be collected then assessed in upcoming studies. Statistical analysis would show if the suggested connections exist in reality and it would improve burnout theory. To assess if targeting ego states lowers burnout rates, intervention studies or longitudinal designs could be included to see how early family dynamics predict later burnout. More effective prevention strategies will be guided by such research as they strengthen the theoretical model.

Conclusion

Burnout has become a concern for people of all ages, and it is no longer confined to professional life. It is increasingly visible in how children and adolescents study, interact with peers, and manage family expectations. This paper brought together Adler’s birth order theory and Berne’s framework of Transactional Analysis to show how family roles and ego states may shape a person’s vulnerability to burnout. Evidence from earlier studies on academic burnout (Walburg, 2014), perfectionism (Flett & Hewitt, 2002), and separation–individuation (Ziv & Hermel,

2011) highlights that stress responses are influenced not only by outside pressures but also by inner personality patterns.

Every birth order position comes with its own set of struggles. The oldest child might feel pressure upon the parents to please. The eldest sibling may become exhausted by trying to meet expectations and achieve perfection. Meanwhile, the middle child may feel attention lacking from their parents, since they are not the oldest or youngest, and may battle at building relationships. Spontaneous and fun, the youngest child can become too attached to the Free Child, and can potentially skip out on addressing the stressor, creating a bigger problem for them later in the future.

Seeing this pattern makes all the difference. When people connect birth order and ego states, family life, school, or therapy may ease. Teenagers could better cope with stress through increased awareness of the role family has on thoughts, feelings, and behavior. Family role knowledge and burnout may aid future research on family psychology and mental health.

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