

## **The Role of Guilt in the Relationship Between Teacher's Job Burnout Syndrome and the Inclination Toward Absenteeism**

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### Abstract

Previous studies have shown that guilt feelings seem to be involved in job burnout process. However, the exact nature of the relationship between burnout, guilt and the inclination toward absenteeism is unclear. The aim of this study was to analyse the role of guilt in the relationship between burnout and the inclination toward absenteeism. The sample in this cross-sectional study was composed of 120 Spanish teachers. A path analysis model was tested. The hypothesized model showed an adequate data fit, including for the mediator role of guilt in the relationship between burnout and the inclination toward absenteeism. The results of this study recommend taking guilt into account as a symptom of burnout in order to perform a more reliable diagnosis of the syndrome and its consequences.

*Keywords:* burnout, guilt, teachers, absenteeism.

### Resumen

Estudios anteriores han demostrado que los sentimientos de culpa parecen estar involucrados en el proceso del síndrome de quemarse por el trabajo (SQT). Sin embargo, la naturaleza exacta de la relación entre el SQT, culpa, y la inclinación al absentismo no es clara. El objetivo de este estudio fue analizar el papel de la culpa en la relación entre el SQT y la inclinación al absentismo. La muestra de este estudio transversal estuvo compuesta por 120 profesores españoles. Se ha testado un modelo de path análisis. El modelo hipotetizado mostró un ajuste de datos adecuado, incluyendo el papel mediador de la culpa en la relación entre el SQT y la inclinación al absentismo. Los resultados de este estudio recomiendan tomar en consideración la evaluación de la culpa como un síntoma del SQT con el fin de desarrollar un diagnóstico más fiable del síndrome y sus consecuencias.

*Palabras clave:* síndrome de quemarse por el trabajo, culpa, profesores, absentismo.

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## Introduction

A relevant problem in the current literature on job burnout is the lack of studies that contribute to understanding the structure of this phenomenon and its underlying causal processes (Cox, Tisserand, & Taris, 2005). The models of the processes involved in the relationships between the dimensions or symptoms of burnout are confusing and make it difficult to recognize the phenomenon in its early stages.

Although the Maslach Burnout Inventory model (MBI) (Maslach & Jackson, 1981) has been the leading paradigm in the research on the processes underlying burnout, some alternative models have hypothesized different types of burnout that more closely match the clinical experience (Vanheule, Lievrouw, & Verhaeghe, 2003). In some of these models, guilt feelings have been identified as one of the most destructive burnout factors (Price & Murphy, 1984). Farber and Miller (1981) identified guilt feelings as a symptom of burnout in teachers. More recently, Gil-Monte (2005, 2012) incorporated guilt feelings into a theoretical model to explain different burnout profiles in order to reach a more complete diagnosis, distinguish among people affected by the syndrome, and recognize the syndrome's influence on health problems and absenteeism.

The intensity and sources of strain related to teachers' work are a topic of growing interest in different

educational settings (Kosir, Tement, Licardo, & Habe, 2015), showing that workers in the education sector are a high-risk population with a strong prevalence of work-related stress (Wiegel, Sattler, Göritz, & Diewald, 2015).

Studies on burnout in teachers suggest that the levels of burnout among these professionals are elevated and can be positively associated with poor health. The research has identified physiological and psychological symptoms associated with burnout in teachers, such as a more negative perception of their state of general health and psychosomatic problems (Watts & Robertson, 2011).

Previous studies have identified psychological stressors associated with burnout, such as work overload (Doménech-Betoret, 2009) and role ambiguity (Avargues, Borda, & López, 2010) in samples of teachers.

Work overload is present when the task demands exceed the worker's capacity to carry them out; that is, when there is an imbalance between what is asked of the worker and what he/she can fulfil. Work overload can be quantitative or qualitative (INSHT, 2002), and it has been pointed out in different studies as one of the most intense sources of stress in the professional collective of teachers (Kerr, Breen, Delaney, Kelly, & Miller, 2011). Various studies with teachers have concluded that work overload is one of the most important

predictors of burnout in this collective and strongly related to the emotional component of the syndrome (Hakanen, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2006).

Role ambiguity can be defined as a worker's state of uncertainty about his/her job due to a lack of information about it (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964). Role ambiguity is a relevant predictor of burnout in teachers according to different studies (Beehr, Bowling, & Bennett, 2010), and specifically of the cognitive component of burnout (Rubino, Luksykte, Perry, & Volpone, 2009).

Guilt is defined as disagreeable and remorseful feelings associated with the awareness that one has violated, or is capable of violating, a moral norm. Unlike shame, where the focus of attention involves a negative assessment of the global self, guilt involves a negative assessment of a specific behaviour (Tangney & Tracy, 2012). From an interpersonal approach (Baumeister, Stillwell, & Heatherton, 1994), guilt has been described as a social emotion linked to communal relations. The origins, functions and processes of guilt have important interpersonal aspects, as it is a variable that reinforces the ties in interpersonal relations. Guilt has the symbolic role of reaffirming one's commitment to another person and the responsibility of taking care of him/her. Guilt feelings have prosocial effects, as they motivate people to make peace with others, cor-

rect their own errors, and ask for forgiveness. However, even though guilt has prosocial effects (Cohen, Panter, & Turan, 2013), excessive or inappropriate levels of guilt can produce a dysfunctional and prejudicial experience as either psychological and/or somatic symptoms in some cases (Pineles, Calle, & Koenen, 2006).

Guilt seems to be involved in the burnout process (Farber & Miller, 1981; Maslach, 1982; Price & Murphy, 1984). According to Farber and Miller (1981) "the symptomatic manifestations of teacher burnout are anger, anxiety, irritability (...), cynicism, guilt..." One frequent cause of guilt feelings in professionals is the presence of negative thoughts about others and about the negative and cynical way they have treated the end-users. Some professionals underestimate the influence of situations on behaviour, and they interpret their experiences as a reflection of some anomalous functioning of the personality, leading them to blame themselves for not doing their job well. As a result, they develop feelings of failure and loss of self-esteem (Maslach, 1982, p. 5).

In addition, these professionals could feel that they are becoming cold and dehumanized people, and this experience leads them to reaffirm their commitment to others and the responsibility of taking care of them (Baumeister et al., 1994), thus producing higher levels of burnout. According to Chang (2009),

for many teachers guilt is an uncomfortable emotion caused by the emotional work and bad relations with the students.

Various studies on the burnout process include guilt feelings as a stage in the development of this process. Price and Murphy (1984) state that “a typical burnout victim is a professional full of idealism and a sense of mission”. The burnout would progress in different phases: shock, disorganization, volatile emotions, guilt, loneliness, relief, and reconstruction. For these authors, feelings of “guilt are among the most destructive factors in the stress syndrome that so often, and so wastefully, results in staff burnout”.

Furthermore, guilt feelings could explain different types of burnout, based on their role in the relationship between burnout and its consequences. Vanheule et al. (2003) differentiate two types of high levels of burnout (Type 1 vs Type 2), taking into account the way professionals feel it is their responsibility to meet the needs and desires of others.

Regarding the guilt variable, burnout has been defined as a psychological response to chronic job strain that appears in professionals who work in the services sector and come into direct contact with the clients or end-users of the organization. It is a non-psychiatric syndrome characterized by cognitive impairment (loss of enthusiasm toward the job), emotional impair-

ment (psychological exhaustion), and attitudes and behaviours of indifference and, sometimes, abusive attitudes toward the client (indolence). Moreover, in some cases, negative attitudes on the job, especially toward people with whom the professional establishes work relations, are accompanied by strong feelings of guilt (Gil-Monte, 2005).

Enthusiasm toward the job is a cognitive variable that is defined as the individual's desire to achieve work-related goals as a source of personal pleasure. This variable is similar to the personal fulfilment subscale of the MBI (Maslach & Jackson, 1981), but it does not include a self-efficacy indicator. Psychological exhaustion is defined as the appearance of emotional and physical exhaustion due to the fact that the individual has to deal with people who present problems every day at work. This variable is similar to the emotional exhaustion subscale of the MBI (Maslach & Jackson, 1981), but it includes an aspect of physical exhaustion (I feel physically tired at work). Indolence is the appearance of negative attitudes of indifference and cynicism toward the organization's clients, such as students and family members (Richmond, Llave, & Gorham, 2009). This symptom is similar to the depersonalization subscale of the MBI (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Guilt is conceptualized as the appearance of guilt feelings about negative attitudes developed on the job, especially toward the people with whom

the individual establishes work relationships. These four symptoms have been presented in a model of the development process of burnout (Gil-Monte, 2005, 2012). The Spanish Burnout Inventory (SBI) (Gil-Monte & Figueiredo-Ferraz, 2013) was developed to evaluate these four aspects of burnout.

According to Gil-Monte (2005), burnout advances in a parallel way from loss of enthusiasm for work and psychological exhaustion to attitudes and behaviours of cynicism and indifference toward the client (indolence). Indolence is considered a dysfunctional coping strategy, rather than an effective one (Taris, Le Blanc, Schaufeli, & Schreurs, 2005), carried out after a stage of reassessment. This approach takes into account the model of attitudes and attitude change (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993), which concludes that attitudes are the result of a series of experiences the individual has with the attitudinal object, and thus the final product of the cognitive and behavioural processes through which these experiences have taken place.

Taking into consideration this burnout model and feelings of guilt, Gil-Monte (2005) developed a theoretical model to explain the underlying processes of the burnout concept. Based on this model, in some cases, negative attitudes at work, especially toward people with whom the worker establishes work relationships (Indolence), lead to high feelings of guilt. The

model describes two patterns in the development of burnout. Attitudes and behaviours of indolence can be viewed as a coping strategy used to deal with the cognitive deterioration (loss of enthusiasm toward the job) and the emotional deterioration (psychological exhaustion). However, while for some professionals this coping strategy allows them to manage the levels of strain and develop lower feelings of guilt (Profile 1), other professionals feel uncomfortable with this situation and develop high levels of guilt feelings, more serious manifestations of burnout, related health problems, and high inclination toward absenteeism levels (Profile 2). This process assigns feelings of guilt a mediator role in the relationship between the levels of indolence and the consequences of burnout (Gil-Monte, 2012; Olivares-Faundéz, Gil-Monte, & Figueiredo-Ferraz, 2014).

### **Objective and hypothesis**

The aim of this study was to investigate the mediator role of guilt feelings in the relationship between burnout and the inclination toward absenteeism according to the burnout model by Gil-Monte (2005). Based on prior research, a path analysis model was tested to determine the mediator role of guilt— as a symptom of burnout— in the development of the burnout process, and its relationship with inclination toward absenteeism (Figure 1).

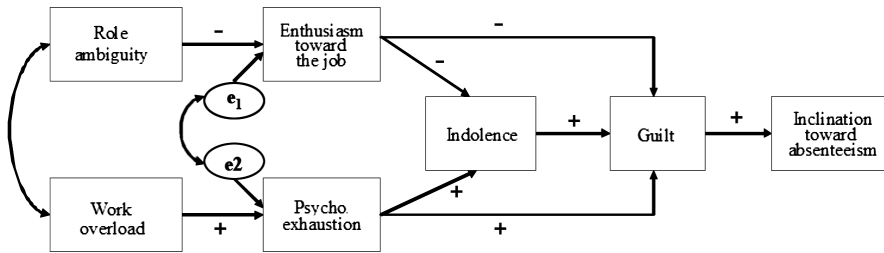


Figure 1. Hypothesized model.

## Method

### Participants

The sample was composed of 120 Secondary school teachers at Secondary Education Institutes (IES) in the Valencian Community; 31.5% were men and 68.5% women. In addition, 57.1% of the participants had permanent destinations, 21.4% were interim, 11.6% were commissioned, 7.1% were in training, and 2.7% had other job situations. In all, 334 questionnaires were passed out, with an overall return rate of 35.93%.

### Procedure

The secondary schools were selected randomly, obtaining 5 schools in all, two type A (IES with more than 24 authorized units) and three type B (from 12 to 24 authorized units). Once the schools had been selected, an interview was arranged with the leadership team to explain the study characteristics,

highlighting the confidential nature of the survey and the purpose of the research. Next, the questionnaires were passed out to the teachers in the school, but without including the members of the leadership team. The questionnaires were collected personally by the research team. They were distributed and picked up during the months of May and June 2012. The statistical programme SPSS 21 and the AMOS 21 programme were used to perform the path analysis and descriptive data.

### Instruments

*Work overload* was evaluated with the Work overload subscale from the UNIPSICO questionnaire (Gil-Monte, 2012), composed of 6 items ( $\alpha = .70$ ) (e.g., “When you are working, do you encounter especially difficult situations?”). *Role ambiguity* was evaluated with the Role ambiguity subscale of the UNIPSICO questionnaire (Olivares-Faúndez et al., 2014). This subscale

is composed of 5 inverted items to evaluate role clarity, and so for the study analyses it was necessary to reverse the scores ( $\alpha = .79$ ) (e.g., "I know what criteria are used to evaluate me"). The items are responded to on a five-point frequency scale (0 "Never" to 4 "Quite often: every day"). Inclination toward absenteeism was evaluated with the *Inclination toward absenteeism* subscale of the UNIPSICO questionnaire (Figueiredo-Ferraz, Gil-Monte, Grau-Alberola, Llorca-Pellicer, & García-Juegas, 2012). This subscale is composed of 4 items ( $\alpha = .72$ ) (e.g., "Would you say you are ill when you don't feel very well, in order to stay home from work?"), rated on a 5-point frequency scale ranging from 0 "Always" to 4 "Never". The items for this variable are written inversely, so that for the study analyses the scores had to be reversed.

The levels of burnout were assessed with the "Spanish Burnout Inventory" (SBI) (Gil-Monte & Figueiredo-Ferraz, 2013). This instrument consists of 20 items distributed in four dimensions called: (a) *Enthusiasm toward the job*: the individual's desire to achieve work goals as a source of personal pleasure, containing 5 items, (e.g., "I feel enthusiastic about my job") ( $\alpha = .90$ ); (b) *Psychological exhaustion*: emotional and physical exhaustion due to the fact that, at work, one has to deal daily with people who present or cause problems, containing 4 items, (e.g.,

"I feel emotionally exhausted") ( $\alpha = .82$ ); (c) *Indolence*: negative attitudes of indifference and cynicism toward the "organization's clients", containing 6 items, (e.g., "I think I treat some students with indifference") ( $\alpha = .69$ ); and (d) *Guilt*: feelings of guilt about negative attitudes developed at work, especially toward people with whom one works, containing 5 items, (e.g., "I feel guilty about some of my attitudes at work") ( $\alpha = .88$ ). The items are responded to on a five-point frequency scale (0 "Never" to 4 "Quite often: every day"). Low scores on *enthusiasm toward the job*, along with high scores on *psychological exhaustion*, *indolence* and *guilt*, indicate high levels of burnout.

### Statistical analyses

To estimate the descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation), internal consistency and correlations (Pearson's  $r$ ) among the variables, the SPSS 21 programme was used. To test the path analysis model, the AMOS 21 programme was employed.

In the present study, the composite reliability and average variance extracted were used as indices of reliability and validity (Table 1).

The maximum verisimilitude estimation method was used to test the model. Various indices are suggested (Byrne, 2001) to test the model fit.

Table 1

*Internal Consistency and Validity of the Dimensions*

	Composite Reliability	Average variance extracted
Work overload	.72	.32
Role ambiguity	.80	.44
Enthusiasm toward the job	.90	.65
Psychological exhaustion	.83	.55
Indolence	.69	.27
Guilt	.88	.60
Inclination toward absenteeism	.73	.41

Due to the sensitivity of the  $\chi^2$  statistic to sample size, we have proposed other fit indices:  $\chi^2/df$  (values below 2 are considered indicators of good model fit) (Carmines & McIver, 1981). In the case of the GFI (Goodness of Fit Index), NNFI (Non Normed Fit Index), and CFI (Comparative Fit Index), some authors have recommended values above .90 (Kline, 2005) or above .95 (Hu & Bentler, 1999) for these indices as indicating good model fit. For the RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation), values between .05 and .08 indicate an adequate model fit (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1995).

Bootstrapping was performed, with the number of bootstraps set at 2000, to calculate confidence intervals of 95%. Preacher and Hayes (2008) have recommended bootstrapping to test the measurement, as it does not require a normal sample distribution of indirect effects.

**Results**

The composite reliability values are satisfactory for all the scales, with results above .70, except for Indolence, which was .69, very close to .70. For the average variance extracted, the values were below .50 for the variables work overload, role ambiguity, indolence and inclination toward absenteeism (Hair et al., 1995) (Table 1).

The skewness and kurtosis values were acceptable for all the variables, as they did not exceed the skewness range of  $\pm 2$  (Miles & Shevlin, 2005). Most of the correlations between the study variables were significant and in the expected direction, but the correlation between Enthusiasm toward the job and Guilt was not significant (Table 2).

The measurement model presented adequate values for the study sample. The model obtained an adequate fit with various indices:  $\chi^2(159) = 184.816$  ( $p > .05$ ),  $\chi^2/df = 1.162$ , GFI = .87, NNFI = .97, CFI = .98, and RMSEA = .04. All of the items presented significant loadings in their corresponding factors for  $p < .001$ .

For the hypothesized model, and given the values obtained on the chi-squared test,  $\chi^2(11) = 17.42$  ( $p > .05$ ), we can conclude that the model fit was not adequate. However, given that this index is sensitive to sample size, other indices were used. The model presents a good fit with the following indexes:



Table 2

*Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Between the Study Variables*

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Range	Sk	Ku	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Work overload	1.70	0.63	0-4	0.46	0.39							
2. Role ambiguity	3.19	0.69	0-4	-0.74	-0.19	.25**						
3. Enthusiasm toward the job	3.00	0.75	0-4	-0.71	0.21	-.15	-.40***					
4. Psychological exhaustion	1.67	0.81	0-4	0.54	0.03	.62***	.29**	-.26**				
5. Indolence	1.26	0.60	0-4	0.69	0.36	.24**	.19*	-.34***	.28**			
6. Guilt	0.89	0.64	0-4	0.84	1.31	.26**	.27**	-.05	.26**	.33***		
7. Inc. absenteeism	2.93	0.85	0-4	-1.18	1.83	.23*	.10	-.04	.20*	.08	.19*	

\*\*\*  $p < .001$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*  $p < .05$ .

$\chi^2/df = 1.58$ , GFI = .96, NNFI = .90, CFI = .95, and RMSEA = .07. Figure 2 shows the standardized estimations of the direct effects among all the variables in the model. The figure reveals that, except for the relationship between *enthusiasm toward the job* and *guilt*, all the other hypothesized relationships were significant and in the expected direction.

Thus, *work overload* was positively and significantly related to *psychological exhaustion* ( $\gamma = .62$ ,  $p < .05$ ), and *role ambiguity* presented a negative and significant relationship with *enthusiasm toward the job* ( $\gamma = -.37$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Regarding the hypotheses related to the burnout development process, the results showed that *Psychological exhaustion* obtained a positive and significant relationship with *Indolence* ( $\beta = .20$ ,  $p < .05$ ), and that *en-*

*thusiasm toward the job* obtained a negative and significant relationship with *indolence* ( $\beta = -.29$ ,  $p < .05$ ). In addition, *psychological exhaustion* presented a positive and significant relationship with *Guilt* ( $\beta = .20$ ,  $p < .05$ ). *Indolence* showed a significant relationship in the expected direction with *Guilt* ( $\beta = .31$ ,  $p < .05$ ), and *guilt* also showed a significant relationship in the expected direction with *inclination toward absenteeism* ( $\beta = .19$ ,  $p < .05$ ) (Figure 2).

Based on the bootstrapping analysis, the standardized indirect effect of *indolence* on *inclination toward absenteeism* was  $-.06$  ( $p < .05$ ; bias corrected 95% CI:  $-.154 - -.006$ ). Supporting the study hypotheses, the relationship between *indolence* and *inclination toward absenteeism* was completely mediated by *guilt*, as the direct effect was not significant ( $\beta = .01$ ,  $p > .05$ ) when the me-

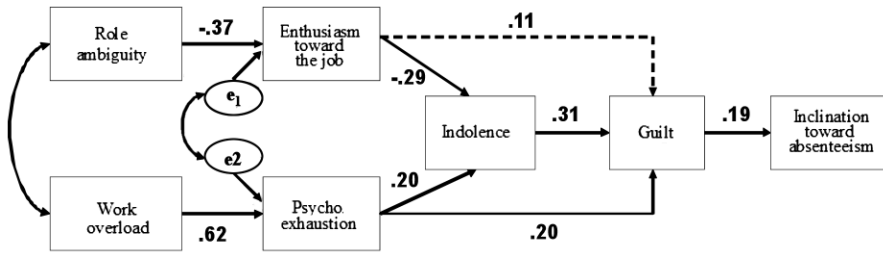


Figure 2. Results of the path analysis model on the burnout antecedents, consequences and process.

diator was introduced in the relationship.

### Discussion

The aim of this study was to analyse the mediator role of guilt feelings in the relationship between burnout and the inclination toward absenteeism. The results indicate that the hypothesized model (that is, the mediation of guilt between indolence and the inclination toward absenteeism) is a good representation of the burnout process and its relationship with the inclination toward absenteeism, and they provide support for the mediator role of guilt feelings in the relationship between burnout and the inclination toward absenteeism.

The results obtained in this study point out that the levels of work overload are positively and significantly related to psychological exhaustion, and that the levels of role ambiguity are negatively and

significantly related to enthusiasm toward the job.

Work overload is one of the most relevant sources of strain in the professional collective of teachers (Alarcon, 2011). These results support others from previous studies that propose that work overload is a relevant antecedent in the burnout development process (Nahrgang, Morgeson, & Hofmann, 2011), and especially in the collective of teachers (Hakanen et al., 2006).

In addition, the results of this study follow along the lines of other studies that point to role ambiguity as a strong predictor of the cognitive component of burnout (low Enthusiasm toward the job/low Personal accomplishment) (Gil-Monte, 2005).

Our results have replicated the results from the study by Gil-Monte (2012), given that it seems advisable to establish a relationship from both Enthusiasm toward the job and Psychological exhaustion to Indolence, and from Indolence to Guilt.

Moreover, our results contribute to supporting the burnout process model designed by Gil-Monte (2005), which takes into account the model of attitudes and change in attitude (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993) to explain the relationship between the burnout dimensions. The study contributes to understanding the causal processes underlying the concept of burnout (Cox et al., 2005). Thus, we can conclude that the syndrome progresses in a parallel way from enthusiasm toward the job and psychological exhaustion to indolence.

Studies carried out in different countries with different professional collectives have found significant relationships in the expected direction between psychological exhaustion and guilt (Figueiredo-Feraz, Gil-Monte, Queirós, & Passos, 2014). In samples of teachers, these relationships have also been found to be significant in studies using confirmatory factorial analysis (Gil-Monte, Carlotto, & Gonçalves, 2010).

Furthermore, it should be highlighted that the results found in these studies indicate that enthusiasm toward the job is not negatively and significantly related to guilt. This result may be due to the fact that when these relationships are introduced in the path analysis model, the level of variance explained by the emotional variable (Psychological exhaustion) and the attitudinal variable (Indolence) on the emotion Guilt has considera-

ble weight in the model. This result may explain the fact that the cognitive variable (Enthusiasm toward the job) is not significantly related to feelings of guilt, even though the direction of the relationship was the expected one. This result also follows the trend of other studies that used the Spanish Burnout Inventory (Olivares-Faúndez et al., 2014).

Results were also obtained in this study supporting the existence of a positive and significant relationship between levels of indolence and guilt (Gil-Monte, 2012), and between guilt and the inclination toward absenteeism. These results reinforce the findings of other researchers who have carried out empirical studies on the burnout development process and its consequences (Olivares-Faúndez et al., 2014).

In addition, the results provide evidence for the mediator role of guilt feelings in the relationship between levels of indolence and consequences of burnout (Gil-Monte, 2012). Therefore, in our study the highest levels of indolence were associated with higher levels of guilt, which in turn were associated with higher levels of inclination toward absenteeism.

The results of this study confirm the proposals that guilt is a variable involved in the development of burnout (Maslach, 1982). Moreover, they support the empirical model developed by Gil-Monte (2005), in which the appearance of

guilt feelings occurs after the cognitive, affective and attitudinal impairment.

As these results indicate, guilt feelings contribute to explaining the existence of different forms of the evolution of burnout linked to the development of guilt (Gil-Monte, 2012). Thus, the different types of burnout (Vanheule et al., 2003) could be explained by taking into account the role of guilt feelings in the relationship between burnout and its consequences, in accordance with the theoretical model underlying the Spanish Burnout Inventory (Gil-Monte, 2005), which indicates that it is possible to distinguish two burnout developmental profiles. While for some teachers the cognitive coping strategies (cynical and indolent behaviours) are effective for dealing with psychological exhaustion and disenchantment (Profile 1), other teachers find these strategies ineffective and feel guilty about their negative thoughts and behaviours toward the end-users of the service, producing important health consequences (Profile 2).

The results of this study offer empirical support for other studies that have found a positive and significant association between burnout and the inclination toward absenteeism (Burke & Greenglass, 1995). They coincide with studies that point out that burnout is not only related to negative results for the individual, but also to negative results for the organization, includ-

ing absenteeism (Leiter, Laschinger, Day, & Oore, 2011).

### **Study limitations**

The response rate in this study was low. This is a limitation of the study, as it can affect the external validity of the results. However, the response rate is similar to what is found in other studies with samples of this type (Platsidou, 2010). The low response rate can be explained by the effects of the economic crisis and governmental and regional employment policies on this collective. During the questionnaire collection process, the teachers frequently complained about their work conditions, their level of stress and anxiety due to staff reductions, and their lack of hope that this type of study will influence their job conditions.

Moreover, the sample was not balanced in terms of sex, as there was a greater percentage of women, although it was similar to other studies carried out in this professional group (Collie, Shapka, & Perry, 2012).

The use of a cross-sectional research design does not offer definitive answers about the direction of the causality between guilt and the inclination toward absenteeism. Longitudinal studies are needed in order to draw conclusions about this topic. In addition, the information collected through closed-answer questionnaires can be limited and may increase the probability of common method variance effects.

### Practical implications

This study contributes to understanding the processes underlying the burnout phenomenon (Cox et al., 2005). The results of this study recommend incorporating the evaluation of guilt as a symptom of burnout, in order to reach a more complete diagnosis, distinguish between people affected by the syndrome, and recognize the syndrome's influence on the inclination toward absenteeism in teachers. Furthermore, this study supports the mediator effect of burnout between certain job conditions and the inclination toward

absenteeism, which could help to produce new preventive intervention strategies.

The study can be an important point of reference for doctors and therapists, facilitating the diagnosis and the treatment of different types of burnout. In addition, the study provides useful tools for diagnosing burnout.

The study can also be useful for detecting the need for intervention programmes to eliminate the sources of stress and the need to train teachers in techniques for coping with stress (Figueiredo-Ferraz, Gil-Monte, Grau-Alberola, & Ribeiro do Couto, 2013).

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