

## Investigating the Relationship between Self-Efficacy and Burnout among NGO Workers

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** NGO workers often find themselves working under conditions involving high emotional labour and limited resources. These conditions make them highly vulnerable to burnout. Self-efficacy, which is an individual's belief in their ability to manage challenges has shown to shield workers from exhaustion in professional settings. However, its role in the NGO sector specifically, especially in India remains understudied. **Aim:** The current study examines the relationship between self-efficacy and burnout among NGO workers in Bangalore. **Methodology:** A correlational study was done. The sample consisted of 73 full-time service-oriented NGO workers in the age gap between 30-50 years selected through convenience and snowball sampling. Data were collected through the General Self-Efficacy Scale by Schwarzer & Jerusalem (1995) and the Copenhagen Burnout Inventory by Kristensen et al (2005). Descriptive analyses, Pearson's correlation and simple linear regression were conducted using SPSS. **Results:** NGO workers showed moderate levels of self-efficacy and burnout across all three dimensions (personal burnout, work-related burnout and client-related burnout). Self-efficacy showed significant negative correlations with personal burnout ( $r = -.402$ ), work-related burnout ( $r = -.426$ ), client-related burnout ( $r = -.520$ ) and overall burnout ( $r = -.486$ ). Regression analysis revealed that self-efficacy was significantly associated with lower burnout levels accounting for 23.6% of variance in burnout ( $p < .001$ ). **Conclusion:** The findings highlight that higher self-efficacy is linked to lower levels of burnout among NGO workers. So, strengthening the self-efficacy levels of NGO workers may work as a protective factor in shielding them against probable exhaustion.

**Keywords:** *Self-efficacy, burnout, NGO workers, Copenhagen Burnout Inventory, General Self-efficacy Scale*

Non-Governmental Organizations in today's society play an important role in addressing social, health, educational and humanitarian concerns especially in communities where government or other private entities cannot reach and meet all needs effectively. Especially in a country like India, NGO workers are often involved in supporting vulnerable populations such as children, women, elderly people and other groups of people facing social, emotional and economic difficulties. While this area of work can be deeply meaningful and valuable for the betterment of the society, it can be very emotionally

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and mentally demanding. NGO workers often find themselves in situations involving interpersonal interaction and emotional labour. And to be in places with limited resources and high expectations can take a huge toll emotionally as well as physically. Therefore, psychological well-being of these individuals becomes a huge concern.

One of the major concerns relating to the nature of occupation especially in service-oriented professions is burnout. Burnout is more than tiredness or stress. It refers to a prolonged state of emotional, mental and physical exhaustion when individuals are exposed to chronic stress over time. World Health Organisation (2019) recognises burnout as an occupational concern resulting from chronic stress that has not been managed successfully. Burnout does not only affect the emotional and the mental aspects of an individual. It deteriorates one's work productivity, efficiency, motivation, interpersonal relationships and quality of service.

In the present study, burnout has been conceptualised using Copenhagen Burnout Inventory. The CBI understands burnout across personal, work-related and client-related dimensions that seem very relevant to the NGO workers' nature of organizational climate. The individuals experience exhaustion not only due to workload, but also from sustained emotional interaction with clients. Many NGO roles especially the ones dealing with health require workers to be empathetic, responsive, patient even when they themselves may be under pressure. (Kristensen et al., 2005).

Research from other helping professions has shown that burnout is common amongst jobs involving high emotional labour and interpersonal interaction. In the Indian Context, high levels of burnout have been reported amongst medical residents especially in relation to personal and work-related exhaustion (Rathnakaran et al.,2016). Similarly, moderate to high burnout has also been observed among Indian healthcare workers under demanding work conditions with limited resources acting as a contributing factor. Although these studies were conducted in healthcare settings, they point toward a common pattern. Professions that require high level of emotional commitment and continuous human engagement are vulnerable to burnout. And NGOs share many of these characteristics.

However, not every individual experience stress or burnout the same way. This leads us into looking at an individual's subjective ability to cope with such demands. One such ability or a psychological factor is self-efficacy. Self-efficacy refers to a person's belief in their ability to manage situations, solve problems and deal effectively with challenges. Individuals with higher self-efficacy are generally more likely to regulate stress effectively and complete tasks efficiently. Whereas, people with lower levels of self-efficacy struggle and are overwhelmed when faced with pressure (Bandura,1977).

In work settings, self-efficacy influences how workers respond to workload, emotional strain and demands. An individual who feels capable of handling such situations may be less overwhelmed by it. On the other hand, an individual who doubts their ability to cope may be more vulnerable to exhaustion and burnout. Therefore, self-efficacy is often considered as a protective psychological factor.

Previous studies across professions have consistently shown a negative relationship between self-efficacy and burnout. Higher self-efficacy has been associated with lower emotional exhaustion amongst teachers (Betoret,2006). Similarly, self-efficacy has been found to significantly predict lower burnout in educational settings suggesting that confidence in one's own ability may reduce strain in demanding environments. (Bing et al.,2022). A similar

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negative relationship has also been observed amongst clinical nurses, where self-efficacy emerged as a significant predictor of lower occupational burnout (Xie et al., 2024). Some Indian studies also point to a similar pattern indicating that self-efficacy may reduce emotional exhaustion in demanding work contexts (Toppo, 2012., Mukherjee et al., 2024).

Despite this, limited research has been focused on NGO workers in India. Given the unique demands of NGO work, it is important to examine whether self-efficacy plays out a protective role against burnout in this population. The present study aims to fill this gap.

### *Objectives and Hypotheses*

The study aims to investigate the relationship between self-efficacy and burnout among NGO workers currently working in Bangalore. Specifically, the study seeks to assess the levels of self-efficacy and burnout among NGO workers and examine if self-efficacy is significantly associated with overall burnout and its dimensions. In addition, the study aims to determine whether self-efficacy predicts burnout.

The study tests the following hypotheses:

- **H1:** Self-efficacy will show a negative relationship with burnout.
- **H2:** Self-efficacy will show a negative relationship with personal burnout, work-related burnout and client-related burnout.
- **H3:** Self-efficacy will significantly predict burnout among NGO workers.

By addressing these objectives, the present study seeks to provide evidence on the psychological role of self-efficacy in reducing burnout among NGO workers and contribute to existing literature related to occupational well-being and service-oriented professions.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### *Participants/Sample*

Using a convenience and snowball sampling approach, the present study included 73 NGO workers (N=73) aged between 30-50 years. The sample consisted of both male and female participants with a relatively balanced gender distribution. To be eligible for this study, the participants had to be full-time NGO workers engaged in service-oriented roles involving direct interaction with clients and beneficiaries.

### *Inclusion Criteria*

1. Full-time NGO workers employed in service-oriented organizations.
2. Individuals aged 30-50
3. NGO workers who directly involve in dealing with clients.
4. Individuals willing to participate voluntarily and provide informed consent.

### *Exclusion Criteria*

1. Part-time, temporary or internship-based NGO workers.
2. Individuals who work in administrative roles or non-service roles without client interaction.

### *Ethical Considerations and Data Collection*

Data were collected through direct administration of questionnaires. Informed consent was obtained prior to the participation. Participation was voluntary and confidentiality was

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maintained throughout the study. The purpose of the study was also explained. The participants had the right to withdraw from the study whenever they wanted to.

### *Assessment Tools Used*

1. The **General Self-Efficacy Scale** (Schwarzer & Jerusalem,1995) is a validated tool that evaluates an individual's belief in their ability to cope with challenges, manage situations efficiently and respond effectively to stress. The tool consists of 10 items rated on a 4-point Likert Scale (1= Not at all true to 4= Exactly true). The possible scores range from 10-40 with higher scores indicating higher self-efficacy. The scale demonstrated good psychometric properties across various regions with Cronbach's Alpha values ranging from 0.76-0.90.
2. **Copenhagen Burnout Inventory** was used to assess burnout developed by Kristensen et al (2005). The CBI consists of three dimensions: personal burnout, work-related burnout and client-related burnout. These dimensions are particularly suitable in relation to service-oriented professions since it captures general exhaustion as well as the exhaustion that comes as a result while dealing with clients. The inventory showed strong reliability with Cronbach's Alpha values of 0.86 for personal burnout, 0.87 for work-related burnout and 0.85 for client related burnout.

**Procedure:** Prior to data collection, the participants working in NGOs located in Bangalore were approached directly and through professional networks as well as participant referrals. The aim of the study was clearly explained beforehand. The participation was entirely voluntary and the participants were assured responses would be kept confidential and used only for academic and research purposes. The General Self-Efficacy and Copenhagen Burnout Inventory was administered as the part of data collection process. Participants were assured that there were no right or wrong answers and asked to complete the questionnaires fully without omitting any questions. Participant anonymity was maintained throughout the study.

**Data Analysis:** Once the required number of responses were obtained, the data was coded and entered into SPSS. The descriptive and inferential analyses were conducted. Skewness and Kurtosis values were examined to see whether the data was normally distributed. Pearson Correlation Matrix was used to investigate the relationship between self-efficacy and burnout and its dimensions. Simple linear regression was conducted to determine whether self-efficacy significantly predicted burnout.

## **RESULTS**

The findings revealed moderate levels of self-efficacy and moderate levels of burnout across all three dimensions. As shown in Table 1, mean scores suggest NGO workers perceive themselves as moderately capable of handling challenges as well as experiencing a noticeable level of exhaustion related to work and client interactions.

*Table 1: Showing the Descriptive Statistics for Self-Efficacy, dimensions of burnout and overall burnout*

Variable	N	Skewness	Kurtosis	Mean	SD
Self-Efficacy	73	0.03	0.47	28.38	2.79
Personal Burnout	73	0.19	-0.34	44.07	10.41
Work-related Burnout	73	0.06	-0.36	44.91	11.54
Client-related Burnout	73	0.39	0.53	43.95	11.62
Overall Burnout	73	0.15	0.10	44.34	10.37

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H2 was supported as results showed that self-efficacy and burnout along with its dimensions were significantly and negatively correlated. Table 2 shows findings indicate that higher self-efficacy is associated with lower levels of burnout among NGO workers.

**Table 2: Showing the Correlation between Self-Efficacy and Burnout**

Variable	r
Personal Burnout	-.402
Work-related Burnout	-.426
Client-related Burnout	-.520
Overall Burnout	-.486

Note:  $p < .01$

The strongest relationship was observed between self-efficacy and client related burnout aligning with the aim of the study. The regression analysis as seen in Table 3 revealed that self-efficacy accounted for 23.6% variance indicating as a significant and meaningful predictor of burnout. Therefore, the findings were aligning with H3.

**Table 3: Showing the Regression predicting Burnout from Self-Efficacy**

Predictor	$\beta$	R <sup>2</sup>	p
Self-efficacy	-.486	.236	< .001

## DISCUSSION

The current study aimed to examine the relationship between self-efficacy and burnout among NGO workers in Bangalore. The results revealed a significant negative relationship between self-efficacy and burnout indicating that NGO workers who reported higher levels of self-efficacy simultaneously reported lower levels of personal, work-related and client-related burnout. One of the other notable findings is that the participants reported moderate levels of burnout across all three dimensions. This explains the emotionally demanding work associated with NGO work settings. The interpersonal interaction with clients undergoing health troubles and other related concerns demands emotional availability and patience from the individuals making them vulnerable to burnout. The participants reported moderate levels of self-efficacy suggesting that they perceived themselves as moderately capable of handling the challenges associated with their work. Another important finding of the study was the negative association between self-efficacy and burnout. This finding aligns with previous research findings. A study conducted by Betoret found that higher self-efficacy was associated with lower emotional exhaustion and burnout among teachers. (Betoret, 2006).

Similarly, Bing et al. (2022) reported that self-efficacy significantly predicted lower burnout levels suggesting that confidence in one's ability can reduce emotional strain in demanding work environments. In addition, another study conducted by Xie et al. (2024) also found a significant negative relationship between self-efficacy and occupational burnout among clinical nurses, indicating that self-efficacy may play a protective role across different professional contexts. Qualitative evidence also supports this relationship. Burnout in nursing professionals was linked to low perceived competence and emotional burden in a 2020 study (Dos Santos et al, 2020). In Indian context, Toppo (2012) reported a negative relationship between self-efficacy and burnout among para-teachers. Xie et al. (2024) also found a significant negative relationship between self-efficacy and occupational burnout among clinical nurses, indicating that self-efficacy may play a protective role across different professional contexts. An important observation in the present study was the strongest negative relationship was found between self-efficacy and client-related burnout. This is very

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relevant to the NGO context because of direct involvement with beneficiaries. This requires emotional availability, understanding, patience and listening to the client's troubles from the workers' side. The regression analysis further indicated that self-efficacy significantly predicted burnout. This suggests that self-efficacy is not only associated with burnout but also plays a role in explaining differences in burnout levels among NGO workers. However, since burnout is a multi-dimensional concept and can be influenced by additional factors such as workload, organizational support and tough organizational climate. Overall, the findings highlight the importance of self-efficacy as a protective factor in the occupational well-being of NGO workers. Strengthening self-efficacy through training, supervision, and support systems may help reduce burnout and improve long-term work sustainability in NGO settings.

### ***Limitations and Future Directions***

The present study has certain limitations that should be considered. Firstly, the sample size is relatively modest which may limit the generalizability of the results to other regions. Another limitation is that the participation largely depended on accessibility, availability and referrals which may have introduced sampling bias. The study adopted a cross-sectional correlational design which means that causal conclusions cannot be drawn. Use of self-report measures may have introduced the possibility of response bias. Although the findings are meaningful, burnout is a complex psychological concept and may also be influenced by several other personal and organizational factors.

To address these limitations, future research can include more diverse samples of NGO workers from various regions. In addition, future research can examine other variables such as organizational support, workload, coping strategies to develop a more comprehensive understanding of burnout among NGO workers. These efforts may lead to betterment of the psychological well-being of NGO workers and help design more effective strategies and programmes to help this population.

## **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, the present study highlights the significant role of self-efficacy in understanding burnout among NGO workers. The results showed that higher self-efficacy was associated with lower levels of personal burnout, work-related burnout and client-related burnout as well as burnout in general. This suggests that self-efficacy may act as an important protective resource. Given the emotionally intensive nature of work challenges faced by NGO workers, the belief in one's ability to cope with such situations hugely plays an important role in reducing exhaustion. The study also adds to the limited literature on burnout among NGO workers in the Indian context. The study's findings are meaningful, but still the limitations should be considered. On the whole, the study offers preliminary evidence that self-efficacy can be an important psychological resource that can be improved alongside organizational support given in NGOs to improve the psychological well-being of the workers.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

We have no conflicts of interest to disclose.

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