2019

# Predictors of Burnout Among Southern California Special Education Teachers

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Abstract

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Doctor of Philosophy

Clinical Psychology

Walden University

August 2019

## Abstract

Burnout affects the psychological, emotional, and physical well-being of educators. One population influenced by burnout is special educators who teach in autism-specific classrooms. Susceptibility to burnout may be due to the increased rates of autism diagnoses in recent years and because of the specialized duties required of special educators. Research has shown that lack of social support from administrators is associated with burnout in special educators. However, no prior study has examined the individual or combined support from administrators, colleagues, and subordinates as predictors of burnout in special educators. The purpose of this study was to determine whether the amount of social support from administrators, colleagues, and subordinates predicted 3 dimensions of burnout (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and lessened feelings of personal accomplishment) using Bandura's social cognitive theory. The study included 94 special education instructors who teach in autism-specific classrooms in Southern California. Participants completed a modified version of the Social Support at Work Scale, the Maslach Burnout Inventory Educators Survey, and a demographics questionnaire. Of the 3 separate multiple regression analyses, combined social support significantly predicted only 1 dimension of burnout: emotional exhaustion. Individually, only greater administrator support predicted higher levels of emotional exhaustion. This counterintuitive finding suggests that other aspects of administrator support in relation to burnout should be investigated. Implications gleaned from this study may lead to development of burnout prevention programs and earlier assessment of special educators deemed at-risk of developing burnout.

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# Dedication

I dedicate my dissertation work to my family members and mentor who have supported me, encouraged me, and guided me through this process. A special gratitude to my two beautiful children, Mikey and Danni, whom have been my cheerleaders, my strength, and my focus. It is because of you both that Mom made it. I dedicate this work to the memory of my dear father, Mike, who is forever in my mind and heart. I miss you more than words can express, and I hope I have made you proud. *"I did it, Dad."* I dedicate this dissertation to my best friend, Chalee, whose compassion, encouragement, and patience have provided me the motivation to reach my goals. Thank you for being my best friend and always having my best interests at heart. I dedicate this dissertation to Nora Wierzbicki, who taught me inner-strength and resilience that motivated me to persevere during times of adversity. Lastly, and most importantly, I dedicate this work to Dr. Ed Reicks, whose wisdom, guidance, and mentorship have helped shape me into the woman I am today. I cannot thank you enough for your support, encouragement, and insight. I hope this inspires each of you to reach your goals. I love you all.

# Acknowledgments

First, I want to thank God for blessing me with the strength, ability, and motivation to reach my goals. In times of adversity, pain, and struggle, I often felt alone. It was in these times that I turned to God for support and felt His love. I wish to thank my family and mentors for their encouragement and support during my educational journey. I would not be where I am today without their love, insight, and dedication.

Secondly, I would like to thank my friends and colleagues who encouraged me on this journey. Your kind words and support will always be cherished. I have made some lifelong friends and colleagues who accept me unconditionally and who have taught me that friends make life a little sweeter.

Lastly, I would like to thank Dr. Patricia Loun and Dr. Neal McBride for their support and guidance along this dissertation journey. Dr. Loun, you have been instrumental in helping guide me along this path. I value your encouragement, your feedback and your wisdom. Thank you for believing in me. Dr. McBride, thank you for helping make sense of statistics and providing guidance and suggestions with my study. I appreciate you both very much and hope I have made you proud.

Table of Contents

List of Tables ..... v

List of Figures ..... vi

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study ..... 1

Background ..... 4

Problem Statement ..... 6

Purpose of the Study ..... 8

Research Questions and Hypotheses ..... 8

Theoretical Framework for the Study ..... 11

Nature of the Study ..... 13

Definitions ..... 14

Assumptions ..... 16

Scope and Delimitations ..... 17

Limitations ..... 18

Significance ..... 20

Summary ..... 21

Chapter 2: Literature Review ..... 24

Introduction ..... 24

Literature Search Strategy ..... 26

Theoretical Foundation ..... 27

Review of Literature ..... 33

Definition of ASD ..... 33

Historical Perspective on ASD ....35
Historical Perspective on Burnout ....38
Burnout in General Education Instructors ....43
Burnout in Special Education Instructors ....45
Administrator Support ....47
Colleague Social Support....52
Subordinate Social Support....54
Summary....55
Chapter 3: Research Method....58
Introduction....58
Research Method and Design ....58
Population ....59
Participants....61
Sampling Procedures ....61
Data Collection ....63
Instrumentation and Operationalization of Constructs ....65
MBI-ES .... 65
SSWS (modified) .... 67
Demographics Questionnaire.... 69
Data Analysis....70
Threats to Validity ....74
Ethical Procedures ....76

Summary ..... 78
Chapter 4: Results ..... 79
Introduction ..... 79
Data Collection ..... 81
Sample Characteristics ..... 82
Demographics ..... 82
Descriptives for Study Variables ..... 86
Reliability ..... 88
Assumption Testing ..... 89
Linearity Between Predictor and Outcome Variables ..... 89
Multivariate Normality ..... 94
Homoscedasticity ..... 96
Multicollinearity ..... 98
Results ..... 99
Social Support and Emotional Exhaustion Analysis ..... 99
Social Support and Depersonalization Analysis ..... 101
Social Support Against Personal Accomplishment Analysis ..... 101
Conclusion ..... 101
Summary ..... 102
Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations ..... 103
Introduction ..... 103
Interpretation of Findings ..... 104

Theoretical Interpretation ..... 104

Social Support and Depersonalization ..... 105

Social Support and Emotional Exhaustion ..... 105

Social Support and Personal Accomplishment ..... 106

Limitations of the Study ..... 108

Recommendations ..... 109

Implications for Social Change ..... 110

Conclusion ..... 111

References ..... 113

Appendix A: Maslach Burnout Inventory – Educators Survey ..... 130

Appendix B: Social Support at Work Scales (Modified) ..... 132

Appendix C: Demographics Questionnaire ..... 135

Appendix D: Permission to Use Modified Social Support at Work Scales (SSWS) ..... 137

Appendix E: Approval to Use Modified Social Support at Work Scales (SSWS) ..... 138

Appendix F: Approval to Use Maslach Burnout Inventory Educators Edition (MBI-ES) ..... 139

List of Tables

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics on the Demographics of the Sample ..... 85

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Means and Standard Deviations of the Variables..... 88

Table 3. Cronbach's Alpha Measure of Internal Consistency Reliability of the Study Variables ..... 89

Table 4. Variance Inflaton Factors (VIF) and Tolerance Values for DV Subscales Against Predictor Variables..... 99

Table 5. Multiple Regression Analysis Results of Emotional Exhaustion Against Predictors of Social Support ..... 100

Table 6. Unstandardized and Standardized Coefficients of Predictor Variables Against Emotional Exhaustion..... 100

List of Figures

*Figure 1.* Scatterplot assessing linear relationship between personal accomplishment and administrator support means. ..... 90

*Figure 2.* Scatterplot assessing linear relationship between personal accomplishment and colleague support means ..... 90

*Figure 3.* Scatterplot assessing linear relationship between personal accomplishment and subordinate support means ..... 91

*Figure 4*. Scatterplot assessing linear relationship between emotional exhaustion and administrator support means ..... 91

*Figure 5.* Scatterplot assessing linear relationship between emotional exhaustion and colleague support means ..... 92

*Figure 6.* Scatterplot assessing linear relationship between emotional exhaustion and subordinate support means ..... 92

*Figure 7.* Scatterplot assessing linear relationship between depersonalization and administrator support means ..... 93

*Figure 8.* Scatterplot assessing linear relationship between depersonalization and colleague support means ..... 93

*Figure 9.* Scatterplot assessing linear relationship between depersonalization and subordinate support means ..... 94

*Figure 10.* Q-Q plot assessing normality of administrator support total means ..... 95

*Figure 11.* Q-Q plot assessing normality of colleague support total means ..... 95

*Figure 12.* Q-Q plot assessing normality of subordinate support total means ..... 96

*Figure 13.* Scatterplot of special educator emotional exhaustion standardized residual values against standardized predicted values ..... 97

*Figure 14.* Scatterplot of special educator personal accomplishment standardized residual values against standardized predicted values ..... 97

*Figure 15.* Scatterplot of special educator depersonalization standardized residual values against standardized predicted values ..... 98

# Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Burnout has traditionally been examined within the human service professions, including special education instructors, and is comprised of three main constructs: depersonalization, emotional exhaustion, and personal accomplishment (Freudenberger, 1974; Maslach, 1981). Effects from burnout are gradual and progressive and influence the ability of those in the helping professions, including both general and special education instructors, to provide quality instruction to students due to the debilitating physical, psychological, and physiological symptoms associated with the phenomenon (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Several large-scale quantitative studies have addressed factors suspected of influencing burnout in teachers, including lack of existential satisfaction, time constraints, issues with school climate, and student disciplinary issues, for both general and special education instructors (Adera & Bullock, 2010; Bataineh & Alsagheer, 2012; Billingsley, Griffin, Smith, Kamman, & Isreal, 2009; Brunsting, Sreckovic, & Lane, 2014; Loonstra, Brouwers, & Tomic, 2009; McLean, Abry, Taylor, Jimenez, & Granger, 2017; Pas, Bradshaw, Hershfeldt, & Leaf, 2010; Suh, 2015; Tomic & Tomic, 2008; Zarafshan, Mohammadi, Almahdi, & Arsalani, 2013).

Similarly, current researchers have suggested that special education teacher's feelings of burnout are exacerbated when there is insufficient or inadequate social support from family, school administrators, and peers. This lack of social support can increase feelings of emotional exhaustion, leading to burnout (Bataineh & Alsagheer, 2012; Barry, 2012; Cancio, Albrecht, & Johns, 2013; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014). While social support has been cited as important for preventing burnout in

teachers, it is perhaps even more critical for special education instructors working with specialized populations, such as those working in autism-specific classrooms (Barry, 2012). This quantitative analysis was conducted to determine whether the amount of social support provided by administrators, colleagues, and subordinates can adequately predict burnout in a sample of special education instructors, it is important to acknowledge results from previous research on burnout for both general and special education instructors as integral to understanding its influence across various domains and specializations. Similarly, results from this study were analyzed to assess if administrators, colleagues, or subordinates are most predictive of burnout. This information can be used to provide a richer understanding of whether differences between social support providers influence burnout in teachers. For example, results suggested that administrator support is predicative of emotional exhaustion in the sample of teachers. Information gleaned from these findings can be used for a richer understanding of social dynamics that may influence increased emotional exhaustion in special educators as a function of administrator support.

Implications for social change include a more comprehensive understanding of burnout affecting education instructors, contributions for further research on the phenomena of burnout, and creation of programs geared towards minimizing and preventing burnout in teachers. By broadening the awareness of the phenomenon of burnout in special education instructors who teach in autism-specific classrooms, this study can affect positive social change in several ways.

First, by identifying social support as an antecedent to special educator burnout, awareness of its frequency can be examined for instructors deemed at risk of developing it. With a more comprehensive understanding of the influence of social support on burnout, school districts and policymakers can develop new school policies that foster an environment of belongingness to promote communication and cohesion among teachers and staff.

Second, school districts can focus their efforts on reducing teacher absenteeism and attrition for instructors deemed at risk for developing burnout. With fewer teachers missing work, students can receive a more structured and stabile teaching environment that fosters their goals and ongoing progress. By identifying ways burnout influences teacher absenteeism and attrition, school districts can save money on hiring costs while using the money saved to create innovative instructional strategies and programs that foster stress reduction and promote healthy living.

Lastly, influences of social support may be examined as predictors of burnout and can be used as a starting point for further research. The costs of burnout are significant and include decreased morale, lessened productivity, increased attrition and absenteeism, increased risk for unethical or dangerous workplace behavior, physical, psychological, and emotional complaints, and a decrease in workplace commitment (Brunsting et al., 2014; Furunes, Mykletun, Einarsen, & Glaso, 2015). Future researchers can seek to reduce or eliminate these costs of burnout, which in turn can help maximize positive prosocial changes for special education instructors, the students they teach, and society as a whole.

This chapter is organized into the following sections: (a) introduction, (b) background, (c) problem statement, (d) purpose of the study, (e) research questions and hypotheses, (f) theoretical framework for the study, (g) nature of the study, (h) definitions, (i) assumptions, (j) scope and delimitations, (k) limitations, (l) significance, and (m) summary.

## Background

It has often been cited that special education teachers working exclusively with children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) purportedly have the highest risk of developing burnout due to the unique stressors of the job (i.e., children's aggressive and/or self-injurious behaviors) and the specialized training required to intervene with such behaviors (Hendricks, 2011; Zarafshan et al., 2013). Some researchers have suggested that social support is significant for both general and special education instructors as a predictor of burnout, but especially critical to instructors working within specialized populations such as those with ASD (Barry, 2012; Billingsley, 2007; Bozonelos, 2008; Brunsting et al., 2014; Wells, 2017). Similarly, current literature has shown that lack of support from family, school administrators, and peers increases attrition, lessens productivity, increases feelings of depression, and lessens feelings of satisfaction for instructors (Brunsting et al., 2014; Cooley & Yavanoff, 1996; Johnson & Sessions, 2015; Wheeler & LaRocco, (2009).

For example, Washburn-Moses (2009) presented risk factors associated with burnout as exacerbated in instructors when perceived expectations of administrator social support are not in alignment with actual support. Similarly, Cancio et al. (2013) and

Wells (2017) concluded that insufficient social support from administrative staff influences teacher job attitude, feelings of burnout, increased absenteeism, and staff turnover.

Peers also play an important role in the prevention of burnout. For example, Schlichte, Yessel, and Merbler (2008) discussed the importance of teachers who collaborated with their peers on such issues as classroom schedules, time management, and techniques for working with behavioral students to buffer against the effects of burnout. Those instructors who did not collaborate with peers reported higher instances of emotional exhaustion and limited personal accomplishment, resulting in increased perceptions of burnout (Schlichte et al., 2008). Similarly, Yavuz (2018) discussed the importance of receiving support from colleagues and validation from administrators to minimize feelings of burnout and maximize job satisfaction experienced by special educators.

Physical proximity to other staff and excessive job stress (grading papers, dealing with child behaviors, time constraints, administrative budget cuts, parent/teacher meetings) have additionally been shown to influence perceptions of burnout in special education instructors. For example, Suh (2015) argued the importance of instructors being in close physical proximity to other teachers to help foster feelings of belonging and to lessen the possibility of developing burnout. Similarly, Blazer (2010) and Billingsley et al. (2009) posited that billions of dollars are spent annually in replacing and training new special education teachers as a result of the emotional exhaustion experienced by many instructors.

A significant body of literature exists on social support as a predictor of burnout in both general and special education teachers. However, literature is scarce on the amount of support from administrators, colleagues, and subordinates as predictors of burnout in special education teachers working exclusively in autism-specific classrooms (Billingsley et al., 2009; Cancio et al., 2013; Furunes et al., 2015; Schlichte et al., 2008). This study was necessary as it addressed the gap in existing literature by assessing the amount of social support provided to special education instructors from administrators, colleagues, and subordinates as predictors of burnout in special education teachers working in autism-specific classrooms within Southern California. Results from this study can provide insight on if the amount of social support provided by administrators, colleagues, and subordinates influences the level of burnout experienced by special education instructors. For example, results from this study suggested that support from administrators increased teachers' perceptions of emotional exhaustion. These findings may be used to foster further research on factors influencing special education instructors' feelings of burnout out in a school environment.

## Problem Statement

To address the problem of burnout affecting special education instructors, it is important to first understand the factors which contribute to feeling burned out. Teachers who have undergone prolonged job stress due to time constraints, excessive paperwork, student misbehaviors, poor school climate, student motivational issues, and insufficient social support often begin feeling lessened feelings of personal accomplishment, resulting in job burnout (Griffith, Barbakou & Hastings, 2014; McLean et al., 2017; Pepe &

Addimando, 2013; Schaufeli, Leiter, & Maslach, 2004). Symptoms include cynicism/detached empathy, lessened feelings of job self-efficacy, and emotional exhaustion (Antoniou, Ploumpi, & Ntalla, 2013; Pas et al., 2012). Symptoms such as cynicism and emotional exhaustion can affect the quality of education teachers provide students and influence the psychological, physical, and physiological wellbeing of instructors (Adera & Bullock 2010; Billingsley, 2007; Schaufeli et al., 2009).

Researchers have suggested that social support from administrators has been found to negatively influence perceptions of burnout in special education teachers (Bataineh, 2009; Bataineh & Alsagheer, 2012; Bolger & Amarel, 2007; Brunsting et al., 2014). Similarly, physical proximity to peers and use of mindfulness in coping strategies have shown to influence feeling of burnout, in which teachers who were physically closer to their peers and engaged in mindfulness for stress relief experienced less occurrences of burnout, suggesting both proximity and coping strategies influence feelings of burnout (Skinner & Beers, 2014; Suh, 2015).

However, a paucity of research exists on if social support from administrators, colleagues, and subordinates influences the level of burnout experienced by special education instructors. By increasing the amount of social support provided by these sources, a more prosocial environment can be established to foster feelings of belongingness and cohesion among administration and staff, which can ultimately decrease perceptions of burnout experienced by special educators.

## Purpose of the Study

This quantitative analysis was conducted to determine whether the amount of social support provided by administrators, colleagues, and subordinates can accurately predict the three subscales of burnout (depersonalization, emotional exhaustion, and personal accomplishment) in a sample of Southern California special education teachers in autism-specific classrooms. In this study, I used an adaptation of the Social Support at Work Scale (SSWS; Etzion, 1984) and the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI-ES; Maslach & Jackson, 1986). The SSWS has been designed to measure the amount of social support from administrators, colleagues and subordinates, and the MBI-ES measures teacher burnout using three individually scored subscales (depersonalization, emotional exhaustion, and personal accomplishment). My intent in this study was to examine the influences of three predictor variables in the amount of social support from administrators, colleagues, and subordinates, on the dependent variable, level of burnout, (depersonalization, emotional exhaustion, and personal accomplishment) in a sample of Southern California special education instructors who teach in autism-specific classrooms. By examining whether social support from administrators, colleagues, and subordinates influence burnout in special education instructors, a richer understanding of its effects can foster necessary burnout prevention programs for teachers deemed at-risk.

## Research Questions and Hypotheses

Three research questions (RQ) and their associated hypotheses guided this study:

RQ1: Does the amount of social support provided by administrators, colleagues, and subordinates, as measured by scores on the modified SSWS, individually or in linear

combination predict depersonalization as measured by scores on the MBI-ES among special education teachers in Southern California working with children with ASD?

$H1a_0$: The amount of social support provided by administrators, colleagues, and subordinates as measured by scores on the modified SSWS, individually or in linear combination, do not adequately predict depersonalization as measured by scores on the MBI-ES among special education teachers in Southern California working with children with ASD.

$H1a_1$: The amount of social support provided by administrators, colleagues, and Subordinates, as measured by scores on the modified SSWS, individually or in linear combination, do adequately predict depersonalization as measured by scores on the MBI-ES among special education teachers working in Southern California with children with ASD.

RQ2: Does the amount of social support provided by administrators, colleagues, and subordinates, as measured by scores on the modified SSWS, individually or in linear combination predict emotional exhaustion as measured by scores on the MBI-ES among special education teachers in Southern California working with children with ASD?

$H2b_0$: The amount of social support provided by administrators, colleagues, and subordinates, as measured by scores on the modified SSWS, individually or in linear combination, do not adequately predict emotional exhaustion as measured by scores on the MBI-ES among special education teachers working in Southern California with children with ASD.

*H*2b$_1$: The amount of social support provided by administrators, colleagues, and subordinates, as measured by scores on the modified SSWS, individually or in linear combination, do adequately predict emotional exhaustion as measured by scores on the MBI-ES among special education teachers working in Southern California with children with ASD.

RQ3: Does the amount of social support provided by administrators, colleagues, and subordinates, as measured by scores on the modified SSWS, individually or in linear combination predict lessened feelings of personal accomplishment as measured by scores on the MBI-ES among special education teachers in Southern California working with children with ASD?

*H*3c$_0$: The amount of social support provided by administrators, colleagues, and subordinates, as measured by scores on the modified SSWS, individually or in linear combination, do not adequately predict lessened feelings of personal accomplishment as measured by scores on the MBI-ES among special education teachers working in Southern California with children with ASD.

*H*3c$_1$: The amount of social support provided by administrators, colleagues, and subordinates, as measured by scores on the modified SSWS, individually or in linear combination, do adequately predict lessened feelings of personal accomplishment as measured by scores on the MBI-ES among special education teachers working in Southern California with children with ASD.

## Theoretical Framework for the Study

In this study, I used the theoretical framework of social cognitive theory (SCT), which was first conceptualized by Bandura (1986; 1997). The model is operationalized by using the concept of triadic reciprocal causation, which includes three core concepts: personal influences (affective, cognitive, and biological), behavior, and environmental contingencies (Bandura, 1986; Bandura & Walters, 1966). The core assumptions of SCT are how people typically acquire and maintain behavioral patterns in life based on conscious cognitive awareness of a situation and the environmental factors associated with it. Thus, interactions between personal factors and behavior are fluid and change as a function of the environmental conditions (Bandura, 1986). In SCT, behaviors are not construed as mechanistic byproducts of a stimulus/response paradigm but are conceptualized as an inclusive interaction among cognitions, affect, biology, and environment.

The three main functions encompassing SCT theory include acquisition of knowledge (modeling/imitation), social/structural interconnectedness (social networks, social support), and adoption determinants (self-efficacy; Bandura, 2001). Acquisition of knowledge is the first function of SCT theory, addressing how new ideas and behaviors are taught through the process of modeling and imitation, which were first introduced in Bandura's earlier work using the "Bobo doll" and preschoolers (Bandura, 1961). The most commonly researched function of SCT theory relates to adoption determinants, more commonly referred to as the concept of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). There exists a vast body of literature relating to self-efficacy and the phenomenon of burnout with

special education instructors (Adera & Bullock, 2010; Bataineh & Alsagheer, 2012; Blazer, 2010; Bozonelos, 2008; Ventura, Salanova, & Llorens, 2015; Wang, Hall, & Rahimi, 2015).

The final function of SCT theory relates to social/structural interconnectedness. This concept encompasses the social ties that influence people and foster interpersonal relationships. Social networks are at the heart of social/structural interconnectedness, including social support from family, community, friends, and career (Bandura, 1997). According to Bandura (2001), information flows in a bidirectional manner, in which information is shared among people in a given situation, feedback is then provided (either positive or negative), and subsequent behavior(s) occur. Currently, no known research exists on social/structural interconnectedness within SCT on social support as a predictor of burnout in special education instructors. In this study, I used Bandura's SCT by measuring the amount of social support provided by administrators, colleagues, and subordinates on burnout reported by special education teachers. This gap in existing research on social/structural interconnectedness relating to the phenomenon of burnout in special education instructors supports the necessity for this study and ongoing research. The function of structural/social interconnectedness within SCT theory relates specifically to this study in that the research questions were specific to examining whether social and structural networks within a school environment (i.e., administrators, colleagues, and subordinates) can influence the level of burnout experienced by special education instructors.

## Nature of the Study

Influences of social support on teacher burnout have been examined in multiple studies. However, in this study, I revealed the need to further understand if the amount of social support from administrators, colleagues, and subordinates influence the three subscales of burnout (depersonalization, emotional exhaustion, and personal accomplishment) in special educators teaching in autism-specific classrooms within Southern California. In this quantitative study, I used a cross-sectional survey design to make inferences about the population from participants' responses on their perceptions of burnout at the time they completed the survey (see Creswell, 2009). Participant self-reported responses from the surveys were then scored to analyze the associated hypotheses for this study (see Creswell, 2009).

Male and female participants were selected through SurveyMonkey using stratified random sampling procedures to recruit from the overall population of special education teachers specializing in autism-specific special education classrooms within Southern California. Participants were selected using the percentage of the total number of special education instructors represented by each county in Southern California (Santa Barbara, Ventura, Los Angeles, Orange, San Bernardino, Riverside, San Diego, and Imperial). Participants completed a modified version of the SSWS (Etzion, 1984) and the MBI-ES (Maslach & Jackson, 1986). The SSWS was used to assess the three predictor variables of social support which include administrators, colleagues, and subordinates, and the MBI-ES was administered to analyze the criterion variable of burnout along its three subscales (depersonalization, emotional exhaustion, and personal accomplishment).

The nature of this study was whether special educators' perceived amount of social support from administrators, colleagues, and subordinates can accurately predict burnout (depersonalization, emotional exhaustion, and personal accomplishment). Results from this study can help address whether social support from administrators, colleagues, and subordinates influence special education instructors' feelings of burnout. This, in turn, can lead to the creation and implementation of prevention programs designed to assist teachers deemed at-risk for developing burnout.

## Definitions

*Administrator*: A district leadership team of individuals who provides guidance, secures resources, provides political support and regulations, trains instructional staff, oversees classroom management, provides instructional coaching, and conducts ongoing instructor evaluations (Billingsley et al., 2009; Coffey & Horner, 2012).

*Autism spectrum disorder (ASD)*: A pervasive and lifelong developmental disorder that is diagnosed in early childhood and includes "verbal and nonverbal social communication impairment(s), and behavioral deficits and excesses" and often includes additional cognitive or genetic impairments (American Psychological Association [APA], 2013; National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities [NCBDDD], 2015).

*Burnout*: Feelings of physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion, fatigue, headaches, gastrointestinal issues, and maladaptive behavior patterns (self-medicating, tardiness, attrition, anger) as a result of chronic stress and excessive work demands (Freudenberger, 1974; Maslach, 1981).

*Burnout constructs*: The three constructs of burnout include depersonalization, lessened feelings of personal accomplishment, and emotional exhaustion (Maslach, 1981; Maslach & Jackson, 1981).

*Depersonalization*: A construct of burnout that includes negative or calloused reactions and detached responses to others, especially those being cared for by the one experiencing depersonalization (Blazer, 2010; Maslach, 1981).

*Emotional exhaustion*: A construct of burnout that includes feeling unable to sympathize with another, feeling unable to provide emotional support for another, and feeling overextended in one's emotional reserve (Maslach et al., 2001).

*Lessened feelings of personal accomplishment*: A personal self-evaluation in which one feels less self-confidence, lessened feelings of competence in their job(s), and lessened feelings of professional achievement(s) or growth (Blazer, 2010; Maslach & Leiter, 1997; Maslach et al., 2001).

*Peer:* A person of a similar professional status, a colleague, or another instructor or teacher working within the same organization (Jones et al., 2013).

*Social support*: A buffer against job strain and stress, in which peers, administrators, and subordinate staff provide each other emotional and instrumental support in order to work collectively as a team. More specifically, social support is defined as the amount of (a) emotional reciprocity, (b) feedback from others, (c) appreciation, (d) recognition, (e) ability to take time off when needed, and (f) sharing of duties/responsibilities provided by administrators, peers, and subordinates in predicting burnout in special education teachers (Etzion, 1984).

*Special education*: Specially designed instruction and delivery of that instruction, which adapts to the need(s) of the child within a classroom environment (Individuals with Disabilities Educational Act [IDEA], 2004).

*Special education teacher*: Synonymous with the word "instructor," a special education teacher specializes in teaching children with behavior, cognitive, or developmental disabilities in a classroom environment, and whose credentials, certification(s), and skills are appropriate for the population in which they teach (IDEA, 2004).

*Subordinate*: An assistant to the special education teacher, often still in school and without professional credentials, who supports the teacher in a classroom environment, while functioning as a team to complete daily tasks and assist students (Kratz et al., 2015).

## Assumptions

Several assumptions guide this study. I assumed that participants would answer the questionnaires honestly and completely. To assist with participants completing the questionnaires honestly and completely, I assumed that all participants would read the informed consent form, explaining how confidentiality and anonymity would be maintained as well as their right to withdraw from the study. Secondly, I assumed that all special education instructors participating in the study were representative of teachers either experiencing burnout firsthand or familiar with the phenomenon. Thirdly, I assumed that all participants understood the questions on the surveys and their answers were representative of their comprehension of what the study entailed. Additionally,

based on previous literature, I assumed that the phenomenon of burnout was a valid and quantifiable phenomenon, affecting those in the helping professions, including special education teachers (see Freudenberger, 1974; Maslach, 1981; Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Next, I assumed that the answers were representative of special educators' thoughts, feelings, and perceptions relating to burnout and social support. Lastly, given the assumption that the phenomenon of burnout exists, the motivation of this study rested upon examining the amount of social support from three predictors of administrators, colleagues, and subordinates, as influences of burnout in special education instructors. These assumptions were necessary as a result of the self-reported data collected.

## Scope and Delimitations

To examine factors which predict burnout in special education teachers, I provided self-report questionnaires to a stratified random sample of special education teachers who taught in autism-specific special education classes within Southern California. This study was conducted to examine the amount of perceived social support provided by administrators, colleagues, and subordinates as adequate predictors of burnout in a sample of special education instructors. There were several boundaries specific to this study, including the population recruited for this study, along with the conceptual framework commonly used in similar research. For example, only special education instructors residing and teaching in Southern California who had at least one pupil with an autism diagnosis in their classroom were considered for this study. Similarly, only special education instructors teaching at the K to 6 level were considered for this study in order to keep in line with the research questions and hypotheses.

Additionally, I used Bandura's SCT theory (1986; 1997) as the conceptual framework unifying this study. While there is a plethora of existing research using Bandura's SCT theory (1986; 1997) with regards to how self-efficacy influences burnout in special education instructors (Boujut, Popa-Roch, Palomares, Dean, & Cappe, 2017; Shoji et al., 2016; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015), in this study, I examined the constituent function of social/structural interconnectedness within SCT theory to guide it.

## Limitations

Possible limitations associated with this study included the use of stratified sampling methods, using standardized self-report questionnaires, generalizability, and the potential for response bias and outliers (see Campbell & Stanley, 1963; Creswell, 2009; Frankfort-Namchias & Namchias, 2008). Limitations associated with internal validity included the selection process itself, use of self-report measures, and the potential for response bias and outliers. For example, I used a stratified random sample of special education instructors who resided and worked in Southern California and taught in autism-specific classrooms. By controlling for the selection of participants based on certain characteristics (i.e., special education teacher with at least one pupil with autism in their class, ratio of Southern California teachers per county to the total number of employed special educators within Southern California), these can operate as a threat to internal validity since this study is specific only to this population (see Creswell, 2009). To help reduce the potential for selection bias, all special education instructors who taught within Southern California, had at least one child with an autism diagnosis in their class, and worked in the K to 6 education system were encouraged to participate in this

study. Response bias was another potential limitation to internal validity in which participants could respond in a "socially appropriate" manner or deny and underreport feelings or behaviors, reducing reliability and validity. To limit the potential for response bias, participants completed the questionnaires anonymously online and did not see or interact with other participants (see Creswell, 2009; Frankfort-Namchias & Namchias, 2008). Outliers can limit internal validity since the score is very different from other data collected (Field, 2013). For example, if a score from a participant deviates significantly from other scores obtained for the same question, it may influence the overall score and incorrect conclusions can be made from the analyzed data. To limit this threat to internal validity, Windsorizing variables or deleting outliers from the data were used (see Field, 2013).

Other limitations to internal validity include researcher bias and the potential for confounding variables. To eliminate the potential for researcher bias, the surveys were completed by participants online via SurveyMonkey. Since I did not directly interact with participants, the threat of any undue influence was significantly reduced (see Frankfort-Namchias & Namchias, 2008). Similarly, to reduce the potential limitation as a result of confounding variables, participants were selected based on certain criteria, including the recruitment of special education teachers in Southern California with at least one child with an autism diagnosis currently enrolled in their class. By controlling for the undue influence of confounds, the threat to internal validity was reduced (see Creswell, 2009).

One threat to external validity includes the ability to generalize findings from this study to the population. To reduce the potential for this threat, findings from this study

were limited only to K to 6 special education instructors who had at least one pupil with autism in their class (see Creswell, 2009).

## Significance

This study addressed the gap in existing research by focusing on whether the individual and combined effects of the amount of social support provided from three sources--administrators, colleagues, and subordinates--serve to potentially predict burnout among teachers. The project was unique in that I targeted a sample of special education teachers from Southern California who specialized in working with children diagnosed with autism. Information gleaned from this study can help create intervention programs designed to provide mentoring for teachers most at-risk for developing burnout. Additionally, examining factors which lead to burnout can foster community awareness of the situation and its warning signs. Similarly, results from this study can foster new policy development requiring school superintendents and state policymakers to provide mentoring "buddy" programs, which would pair new teachers with more seasoned instructors for ongoing support.

Results from this research have significant implications for positive social change on several levels. For example, social change can occur at the organizational level with schools creating programs geared towards building strong, supportive relationships among administrators, colleagues, and subordinates. Program success can be tracked and enhanced by implementing ongoing feedback provided by teachers as a means of organizational collaboration. Working together to enrich the environment can lead to better communication among staff, stronger working relationships, and a sense of unity

and belonging, which can help lessen experiences of burnout for special education instructors. Positive social change can also occur on an individual level for instructors. For example, educators who experience less feelings of burnout and higher levels of accomplishment in their work may be less likely to leave their jobs, minimizing teacher attrition, which in turn can provide necessary stability and consistency for special education students. Positive social change can additionally occur at the student and family systems level in which better quality teaching can result in students having higher motivation to learn, leading to higher grades, which can help alleviate the worry experienced by parents regarding their child's performance.

## Summary

Chapter 1 included an introduction on the phenomenon of burnout affecting both general and special education teacher (see Adera & Bullock, 2010; Bataineh & Alsagheer, 2012; Freudenberger, 1974; Loonstra et al., 2009; Maslach, 1981; Yavuz, 2018). Helping professions are at an increased risk of developing burnout, and special education teachers often experience the highest incidences of burnout as a result of the specialized populations they serve. Factors including job satisfaction, work/life balance, insufficient social support, and aggressive or self-injurious student behaviors can influence or exacerbate a teacher's perceptions of burnout (Billingsley et al., 2009; Blaser, 2010; Maslach, 1981). Burnout is dynamic, and its symptoms are progressive, often including psychological, behavioral, physical, and emotional distress (Freudenberger, 1974; Maslach, 1981; Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Depression, anxiety, stomach upset, heart palpitations, high blood pressure, insomnia, headaches,

tardiness/absenteeism, and apathy are often reported as commons symptoms associated with burnout (Billingsley et al., 2009; Blazer, 2010; Freudeberger, 1974).

There is a large body of existing research on the phenomenon of burnout affecting special education instructors (Adera & Bullock, 2010; Barry, 2012; Bataineh & Alsagheer, 2012; Billingsley et al., 2009; Brunsting et al., 2014; Folostina & Tudorache, 2012; Hendricks, 2011; Pas et al., 2010; Yavuz, 2018; Zarafshan et al., 2013). Factors which have been studied as predictors of burnout in teachers include the environmental school climate (i.e., workload, job satisfaction, administrative support, and student behaviors), physical proximity to other staff/instructors, and trait emotional intelligence (Blazer, 2010; Billingsley et al., 2009; McLean et al., 2017; Suh, 2015). However, a gap in research still exists. This quantitative research study helped fill the gap in literature by addressing the overall degree of the relationship among three predictor variables of social support from administrator, colleague, and subordinate staff using survey data in predicting the criterion variable of burnout in a sample of special education teachers in autism-specific classrooms in Southern California. Findings gleaned from this study can foster implementation of intervention strategies designed to promote social support from administrators, colleagues, and subordinates for special education teachers, which in turn can help lower incidences of burnout. Similarly, findings from this study can provide insight on whether these factors of social support influence perceptions of burnout in special educators to help reduce existing burnout and prevent future incidences.

Chapter 2 consists of a comprehensive literature review on the history of ASD, a historical examination on the phenomenon of burnout, burnout as it relates to general and

special education teachers, and a review on the amount of social support from three sources: administrators, colleagues, and subordinates. Gaps in existing research are discussed in the literature review, which help establish the significance and need for this study.

# Chapter 2: Literature Review

## Introduction

The phenomenon of burnout has traditionally been examined in human services professions which includes both general education and special education teachers (Pas et al., 2010). The effects of burnout greatly impact the ability of teachers to provide quality education to students and impacts special education teachers nearly twice as often as general education teachers due to the populations they serve (CDC, 2014; Pas, et al., 2010). Teachers working exclusively with children with developmental disabilities such as ASD are at the highest risk of experiencing the debilitating effects of burnout due the specialized training often required to work within that population (Hendricks, 2011; Langher, Caputo & Ricci, 2017; Zarafshan et al., 2013).

The CDC (2015) posited that 1 in 68 children are currently diagnosed with ASD, with statistics purporting 1 in 42 boys and 1 in 189 girls receiving a diagnosis. As a result of the recent upsurge in diagnoses within the past 10 years, additional job stress is placed on teachers working within this population, which increases the risks for burnout (Bataineh, 2009; CDC, 2015).

Researchers have examined feelings of burnout in special education teachers as being exacerbated when there is insufficient social support from family, administrative staff, and peers (Berry, 2012; Bataineh & Alsagheer, 2012; CDC, 2008; Yavuz, 2018). For example, Bataineh and Alsagheer (2012) argued the importance of spousal and family support as most effective in reducing feeling of burnout in a sample of Jordanian special education teachers. Additional research has provided evidence of the effects of

collegiate support in predicting burnout in teachers. For example, Suh (2015) and Brunsting et al. (2014) posited that physical proximity of teachers and those instructors who receive higher quality, versus lower quantity training, are less likely to succumb to the effects of burnout. Similarly, Wu and Chan (2013) argued the importance of teachers using humor to help cope in stressful or unsupportive working environments to minimize their feelings of burnout.

While these studies have established the importance of social support from family and others in the workplace in examining burnout in teachers, existing research has not addressed which sources of social support in the workplace are most closely related to burnout and its dimensions (Bataineh, 2009). Similarly, current studies often address social support using an informational or transactional measure in which training opportunities and feedback forms are used as a means of social support for teachers (Billingsley et al., 2009; Blazer, 2010). Less research exists on the influences of emotional or instrumental measures of social support (such as reciprocity, appreciation, recognition, and validation) for teachers on perceptions of burnout (Billingsley et al., 2009; Blazer, 2010; Cancio et al., 2013).

Given the gaps in existing research, this study was unique in that I sought to examine instrumental and emotional influences of social support, including the degree of emotional reciprocity, feedback from others, appreciation, recognition, ability to take time off when needed, and sharing of duties/responsibilities of the amount of social support provided by administrators, colleagues, and subordinates in predicting burnout in special education teachers working with children with ASD.

Thus, this quantitative analysis was conducted to determine if the amount of social support provided by administrators, colleagues, and subordinates did individually or in a linear combination adequately predict the criterion variable, burnout, among a sample of Southern California special education teachers working with children with ASD.

This chapter is organized into the following sections: (a) introduction, (b) literature search strategy, (c) theoretical foundation, (d) review of literature, (e) definition of ASD, (f) historical perspective on ASD, (g) historical perspective on burnout, (h) burnout in general education teachers, (i) burnout in special education teachers, (j) administrator support, (k) colleague support, (l) subordinate support, and (m) summary.

## Literature Search Strategy

In order to identify and critique peer-reviewed journal articles and other valid sources of data such as governmental statistics, several key databases were explored and used. Literature searches began at the Walden University library using single and a combination of the following key words in the main topic search engine under both "education" and "psychology" and included *special education teachers, autism spectrum disorder; burnout, social support; theoretical perspective of burnout; theories of burnout; peer support, administrator support, administrative support; family support, work support, peer support; job stress, Maslach Burnout Inventory; burnout, Maslach Burnout Inventory; special education teacher, burnout, Maslach Burnout Inventory; Bandura social cognitive theory; Bandura social cognitive theory, burnout; Bandura social cognitive theory, social support;* and *teacher burnout, special education*

*instructor; special education instructor burnout; autism spectrum disorder*. Several academic databases were extensively searched within the Walden University library, including Thoreau Multi-Database Search, PsychINFO, PsychARTICLES, ERIC, ProQuest, EBSCOhost, and PsychTESTS. Additional sources included California Department of Education, Google Scholar, and the National Association for Special Education Teachers. Database searches regarding the phenomenon of burnout relating to the teaching profession in general and specifically to special education was limited to the last 7 years from 2011 to 2018 to stay abreast of the most current findings. However, an exhaustive literature review included the history of the phenomenon of burnout and an historical research on ASD, which included the years 1911 to 2016. Statistics and demographics were compiled from the CDC database and website and National Institute for Occupational Health and Safety.

In this review, I discuss the existing research on burnout and social support in a population of teachers. A review of special education teachers' perceived experiences with the phenomenon of burnout is also reviewed. Additionally, a review of the literature examining administrator, colleague, and subordinate support on burnout that exists among both general education and special education teachers who teach in autism-specific classrooms is examined. I conclude this review with a summary section.

## Theoretical Foundation

SCT was first theorized by Bandura (Bandura, 1986; 1997; Bandura & Walters, 1966). The core assumptions of SCT are how people typically acquire and maintain certain behavior patterns. A model based on triadic reciprocal causation is used in SCT,

which encompasses a dynamic interaction among personal factors (affective, cognitive, and biological), behavior, and environmental contingencies (Bandura, 1986). These interactions among the three factors are fluid and change a person's behavior based on the existing environmental contingencies and personal factors influencing a situation (Bandura, 2001). Thus, how a person perceives an environment and a particular situation subsequently shapes how they cognitively appraise that environment and how they will choose to behave in a specific context.

Historically, the concept of social learning was conceived by Miller and Dollard (1941), who initially proposed the basis of social learning and imitation to include four specific features: drives, cues, responses, and rewards. This theory used a biological interpretation of behavior as originating within the person in the form of an innate drive or motivation to respond to certain stimuli that produced reward (Miller & Dollard, 1941). Bandura (1966) expanded on Miller and Dollard's theory to include the key principles of observational learning and vicarious reinforcement. In 1963, Bandura created social learning theory (SLT), in which the main ideology of human behavior is posited as being learned. This theory helped demonstrate the value and importance of modeling and imitation in acquiring novel behaviors and provided groundbreaking evidence of the separation between learning and a person's performance on a given task (Bandura, 1966). Bandura then expounded on SLT to include the concept of self-efficacy, in which a person's self-confidence was assessed in how they performed a given task (Bandura, 1977). In 1986, he further expanded on SLT and coined his new theory as SCT, in which cognitive, affective, and biological processes work synergistically to shape

and maintain behaviors (Bandura, 1986). In SCT, behaviors are not merely a product of modeling and imitation, but rather a holistic interplay among environment, cognitions, and biology. At the heart of SCT theory is self-efficacy, in which people evaluate their own abilities to execute specific actions in order to attain a desired outcome (Bandura, 1986).

There are three constituent functions in Bandura's SCT that all work synergistically and include acquisition of knowledge, social/structural interconnectedness, and adoption determinants (Bandura, 2001). Acquisition of knowledge is grounded in how ideas and innovations are implemented by an individual based on their function. Symbolic modeling/imitation is the preferred vessel for which to teach new concepts and ideas to others (Bandura, 2001). Earlier psychological theories focused on learning as a mechanistic process of rudimentary cause and effect through observation of positive and negative outcomes (Bandura, 2001). However, Bandura (2001) argued the importance of human values, behavioral patterns, cognitions, and socio/structural networking opportunities as significant core concepts of his theory in how humans acquire knowledge.

The function social/structural interconnectedness concerns the social networks that tie people to one another. Social/structural networks are part of the core concepts of SCT, which include both environment and situation (Bandura, 1986). Social environment includes any factor that is physically external to the person and can provide opportunities for social support, such as family and career. Social structures comprise clustered networks of people with various ties as well as others who provide connections to other

memberships (Bandura, 1986, 2001). The communication process operates as the situational portion of the social network and was originally conceptualized as unidirectional, in which a source of information is provided to a recipient (Bandura, 1986). However, through social/structural interconnectedness, information flows bidirectionally, in which people share information, provide quality feedback, and emotionally support and influence each other's subsequent behaviors. This function provides the rationale for using SCT theory in this study on social support as predictors of burnout in special education teachers (Bandura, 1986, 2001).

Lastly, adoption determinants are based on the concept of perceived self-efficacy in which both SLT and SCT are based. Perceived self-efficacy is the principal conveyer in how a person masters requisite competencies and learns the consequences of their actions within a given environmental contingency (Bandura, 1986, 2001). SCT posits whether a person will put forth necessary effort to achieve a desired outcome, or if they will give up when faced with adversity (Bandura, 1986). At the core of self-efficacy is personal motivation and outcome expectations in achieving a desired goal one sets out to complete (Bandura, 1997). Self-efficacy is all-encompassing in a person's life and can affect choices a person makes, their innate motivation to succeed, and their susceptibility to burnout within their career. The most significant constructs relating to self-efficacy are one's perceptions of perseverance and ability (Bandura, 1999). Mastery of skills often leads to feelings of competence and increased self-efficacy (Bandura, 2001), which may help buffer the effects of burnout from job stressors, such as insufficient social support.

A large body of research exists on teachers which examines the construct of social support on burnout (Adera & Bullock, 2010; Bataineh & Alsagheer, 2012; Blazer, 2010; Bozonelos, 2008; Losinski & Katsiyannis, 2014; Wang, Hall & Rahimi, 2015; Zhang, Wang, Loskinski, & Katsiyannis, 2014). Existing research has discussed self-efficacy as it relates to Bandura's SCT. For example, an article by Ventura, Salanova & Llorens (2015) used the construct of self-efficacy within SCT theory to analyze job demands (workload; lack of social support) as predictors of burnout in teachers. Findings suggested that to prevent burnout, self-efficacy and engagement in workload need to increase. Practical applications were suggested to include more stringent job training from the Human Resources Department (H.R.) to assist teachers in increasing feelings of self-efficacy. However, the study did not discuss other potential influences of social support as predictors of burnout and limited their study to analyzing only the construct self-efficacy as it relates to SCT theory. Similarly, a study by Vera, Salanova & Lorente (2012) examined the predictive role of self-efficacy within the framework of SCT, in analyzing motivational factors and job demands on burnout in teachers. Results from the study suggested that self-efficacy operates as a predictor in the development of burnout and that teachers high in self-efficacy additionally feel more capable of meeting the demands of the job by utilizing available job resources (organization climate, autonomy). For example, autonomy was described as allowing the teacher to make their own choices on what tasks they will perform each day, while organizational climate targeted a teacher's ability to coordinate with others to finish required work correctly (Vera et al., 2012). While this study used SCT as its foundational theory, it limited its scope to the

construct of self-efficacy within SCT theory. However, while the study used social support as a means of sharing responsibilities and working collectively among staff, further research should consider other influences of social support as predictors of burnout such as appreciation, recognition and emotional reciprocity from administration, peers and subordinates as additional predictors of burnout in teachers.

However, there is no known research on the construct of social/structural interconnectedness within Bandura's SCT examining social support from administrators, colleagues and subordinates as predictors of burnout in special education teachers. Bandura (1986) posits social/structural interconnectedness as one of the key factors of his SCT in which social networks include both relational and environmental interconnectedness. With regard to teachers specifically, these implications include feelings of belonging with the physical proximity to other employees as well as having an emotional support system in which to turn in times of stress (Bandura, 1986; Suh, 2015). This study incorporated Albert Bandura's (1986; 2001) SCT by measuring the component of social/structural interconnectedness provided by: a) administrators; b) colleagues c) subordinates on burnout in special education teachers.

This study built upon existing research on SCT theory (Losinski & Katsiyannis, 2014; Ventura et al., 2015; Wang et al., 2015) by examining the core function of social/structural interconnectedness as it relates to social support and the experiences of burnout reported by special education instructors. The research questions were in line with SCT theory and sought to examine whether social/structural interconnectedness

influences feelings of burnout for teachers who feel a limited connection to their workinsg environment and with those in which they interact.

## Review of Literature

The main focus of this section is to provide an exhaustive review of literature related to the phenomenon and history of burnout, burnout in both general and special education teachers, an historical overview of autism and social support from administrators, colleagues, and subordinates as it relates to burnout in special education teachers. First, a robust definition of what autism is, and how it affects individuals is examined. Next, an exhaustive review of the history of autism is assessed, followed by an examination on the history of burnout. An exhaustive review on burnout as it relates to both general education and special education instructors is then examined. Lastly, this section provides an exhaustive review of literature on the implications of social support relating to special education teachers and its impact on burnout. In closing summary, the rationale for the current study is provided.

## Definition of ASD

ASD commonly appears within the first 3 years of life, causes significant impairment in several key areas of functioning including: behavioral deficits and excesses; and social, cognitive and communication impairment and is a lifelong disability with no known cure (American Psychiatric Association, [APA], 2013; National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities, [NCBDDD], (2015). While children with ASD may look similar to typically-developing children, the ways in which children with ASD learn, communicate, interact, and behave often varies significantly from a typically-

developing peer due to the heterogeneity of the disorder. Behavioral deficits are varied and often include both gross motor and fine motor deficits (Lloyd, MacDonald, & Lord, 2013). Inability to perform age-appropriate behaviors such as dressing oneself; using a pincer grasp or pen/crayon; walking without stumbling, and inability to feed oneself are often reported in children with ASD (Lloyd et al., 2013). Behavioral excesses are often purported as stereotypy with regard to ASD and can include many self-stimulatory or repetitive behaviors such as lining items up, hand-flapping, repetitive skin-picking, or rolling of items between the hands and palms (Laprime & Dittrich, 2014). Language and cognitive deficits can include inability to understand social cues such as hand gestures and proximity of personal space, as well as inability to receptively identify (understand) expressive (spoken) word (Petursdottir & Carr, 2011).

Current statistics purport that 1:68 children receive a diagnosis of ASD annually, with a 78% increase in diagnoses within the past decade. Boys are proportionately at a greater risk of being diagnosed with ASD than girls, with 1:42 boys and 1:189 girls receiving annual diagnoses (CDC, 2014). Parents who have ASD have a 2% - 18% increased chance of having a child with ASD and in identical twin studies, if one twin has a diagnosis of ASD, the other twin is affected up to 95% of the time (NCBDDD, 2015). Given the gravity of an ASD diagnosis with regard to a child's academic and developmental progress, finding and keeping qualified and high-quality special education teachers specializing in the field of ASD is critical.

## Historical Perspective on ASD

The origin of the word "autism" comes from the Greek word "autos" meaning "of self" and was first coined by a Swiss psychiatrist named Eugen Bleuler around 1911 when working with patients with schizophrenia (Sullivan, et al., 2012). No subsequent research existed on autism until a psychiatrist named Dr. Leo Kanner, (1943) initially postulated that autism spectrum disorder (ASD) originated as a nervous condition in children who share a cluster of behavioral eccentricities similar to schizophrenia including: social withdrawal, limited eye contact and speech oddities. In his early research, Kanner observed eleven children who presented with symptoms different from childhood schizophrenia which included severe rigidity and an intense desire to be alone (Kanner, 1943; Wolff, 2004). These observations resulted in Kanner's subsequent research on autism which separated the disorder from schizophrenia (Wolff, 2004).

Kanner's theory of autism was the mainstay until 1968, when Bruno Bettelheim purported his theory that ASD originated from distant and "frigid" parenting, predominately concerning unattached mothers (Bettelheim, 1967; Hingtgen & Bryson, 1971; Wolff, 2004). Subsequent separate research by Rimland (1968) debunked Bettelheim's theory of autism and argued that ASD is a unique disorder comprised of a cluster of specific behaviors including: withdrawal/isolation, unresponsiveness to mother, maintenance of sameness with objects, pays more attention to objects than humans, repetitive manipulation of objects and mute/no speech Interestingly, many of Kanner's definitions of ASD are still referenced today.

In the late 1970s, Michael Rutter postulated his theory of ASD as a form of psychosis originating prior to 30 months of age, and in 1980 The American Psychiatric Association (DSM-III) formally recognized infantile autism as a developmental disorder with these diagnostic criteria (APA, 2000; APA, 1980; Hingtgen & Bryson, 1971; Wolff, 2004). The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder (DSM-III) recognized infantile autism as a cluster of symptoms including an onset prior to 30 months old; a lack of responsiveness to others; bizarre and/or inappropriate speech patterns; with the absence of delusions and hallucinations (APA, 1980).

In 1994, the standards for diagnostic criteria changed to additionally include autism under the umbrella of childhood Pervasive Developmental Disorders (PDD; APA, 1994). And in 2000, diagnostic criteria for autism changed once again to comprise a requirement of six or more items from a diagnostic checklist which included: marked impairment in nonverbal behaviors; failure to develop peer relations; lack of social reciprocity; stereotyped and repetitive behaviors; and preoccupation/perseveration with items (APA, 2000).

Current diagnostic criteria has been revised to include a specifier stating that individuals with a well-established diagnosis of ASD should additionally receive a diagnosis of ASD based on the most recent criteria. However, those individuals not yet diagnosed should be evaluated for other developmental disorders including communication disorders, which can create challenges for clinicians assessing for ASD under the current diagnostic criteria (APA, 2013).

The more stringent diagnostic criteria for ASD in the DSM-V (APA, 2013) can have a detrimental impact on instructors, which can increase their perceptions of feeling burned out. For example, children who should otherwise be in a special education environment may not meet a clinical diagnosis for ASD under the new criteria, which can impact the quality of their education and developmental progress (Theoharis & Causton, 2014). Teachers specially trained in autism may not be able to provide appropriate interventions recommended for children with ASD if a child does not meet the new diagnostic criteria, thus potentially impacting a child's goals and progress (Wall, 2014). Similarly, in light of the changes regarding diagnosis, special education policies have been overhauled, creating a more inclusive environment for students with behavioral and developmental disabilities, but at what cost to students and instructors? (Theoharis & Causton, 2014; Wall, 2014). For example, under the new diagnostic criteria in the DSM-V, children who present with marked deficits in socialization and communication, but without rigid or repetitive behaviors, may be diagnosed with a pragmatic communication disorder instead of ASD (APA, 2013; Theoharis & Causton, 2014). Given the complexity and elusive nature of ASD, the potential for misdiagnosis can occur. McPartand, Reichow & Volkmar (2013) postulate that when applying the proposed DSM-V diagnostic criteria for ASD, only 60.6% of cases with an existing diagnosis for ASD met the revised DSM-V diagnostic criteria (McPartland, Reichow, & Volkmar, 2013). Given the changing climate with regard to diagnostics and the special education environment, supporting special education teachers is critical to minimizing their effects of burnout.

## Historical Perspective on Burnout

Burnout is a phenomenon that has affected millions of people and has traditionally been associated with those individuals working within the human services professions (Maslach & Leiter, 1997). The human services profession is broadly defined, ranging from educators to psychologists, from doctors to social workers, whose main objective is to increase the quality of life both within and across a broad range of skills and settings (National Organization of Human Services [NOHS], 2013). Those professionals working exclusively with diverse populations are often cited as having the most risk for symptoms of burnout (Maslach & Leiter, 1997).

Symptoms of burnout are dynamic, and those experiencing burnout often suffer from psychological, affective, behavioral, and physical symptoms (Al-dyiar & Salem, 2013; Blazer, 2010; Brunsting et al, 2014; Nazeer & Zubair, 2015). For example, psychological symptoms can manifest as depression, anger, dissatisfaction, carelessness, personality, and anxiety, which often impact a person on a continual basis who is experiencing the effects of burnout. Individuals may additionally experience feelings of resentment towards their job, their peers, and those individuals they are supposed to support (Al-dyiar & Salem, 2013; Maslach & Leiter, 1997). Behavioral symptoms may include increased absenteeism, decreased interest in job duties, and decreased job performance, which can be exacerbated by lessened feelings of personal accomplishment (Avalos & Valenzuela, 2016; Blazer, 2010). Creativity and enthusiasm often suffer, resulting in lessened quality of instruction (Al-dyiar & Salem, 2013; Blazer, 2010; Maslach, 1996). Physical symptoms of burnout commonly include headaches, lethargy,

digestive and gastrointestinal issues, and insomnia but can include more severe symptoms such as heart palpitations and high blood pressure, which over time, can lead to cardiovascular disease (Blazer, 2010; Brunsting et al., 2014; Freudenberger, 1974; Maslach et al., 2001).

To conceptualize the historical development of burnout, its initial pragmatic, rather than academic conceptualization, should be examined (Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter, 2001). In 1953, Schartz and Will published the earliest research on burnout of a case study named "Miss Jones", who was cited as being a …"disillusioned psychiatric nurse" yet subsequent academic research on burnout sat dormant for nearly two decades (Maslach et al., 2001). Several fictional characters have also been created as suffering the effects of burnout, including Graham Greene's protagonist in his movie, A Burnt Out Case, who was depicted as a disillusioned architect that quit his job for the unknown in the African jungle (Maslach et al., 2001). However, according to Maslach et al. (2001) the initial burnout trend in America did not reach full academic attention until the mid-1970s due to individualist cultural values which emphasize autonomy and career as synonymous to personal fulfillment.

It was the early works of Freudenberger (1974) who coined the cluster of psychological and physical symptoms as "burnout" in his literature, which subsequently catapulted the phenomenon of burnout to national interest. Freudenberger posited burnout as a syndrome which commonly affects people with somatic symptoms including: lethargy, headaches, gastrointestinal disturbances and sleep disturbances. These symptoms often range in frequency, duration and intensity based on the level of

burnout being experienced by a person (Freudenberger, 1974). Feelings of burnout intensify gradually and can lead to feelings of omnipotence, such as an inflated false-confidence in thinking they can disregard established rules within a company. Paranoia is also common, along with other increasingly dangerous risk-taking behaviors including self-medicating to lessen the uncomfortable feelings of burnout. Physical, somatic and psychological symptoms of burnout often occur first, followed by feelings of cynicism, lack of motivation, inability to concentrate, irritation, and inability to perform their jobs, ultimately leading to feelings of wanting to resign (Freudenberger, 1974).

According to Freudenberger (1977) there are two categories of workers who are most susceptible to burnout: the overachieving "workaholic" and the perfectionist. Both of these types of workers often experience burnout at higher frequencies than other workers as a result of their incessant dedication to their jobs and their inability to separate themselves from their jobs when away from work. Feelings of aloneness are often a core symptom of burnout, which makes examining existing gaps in literature on the effects of social support from administrators, colleagues, and subordinates on the phenomenon of burnout even more necessary.

Freudenberger's groundbreaking work on the phenomenon of burnout paved the way for subsequent research. One researcher, Christina Maslach, began examining burnout in the field of social psychology in the late 1970s, by interviewing participants on questions regarding their jobs, their feelings and the populations they served. These research findings were significant for Maslach, as she later compiled these analyses of

common complaints experienced by the participants into what would become the most commonly used assessment of burnout within the last decade (Maslach et al., 2001).

The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI-ES) was the result of the extensive research from Maslach & Jackson (1981) and was designed to measure specific constructs of burnout syndrome affecting human service professionals which includes both general and special education teachers. The MBI-ES assesses burnout on three main subscales of: depersonalization (callused responses to students; objectifying people); emotional exhaustion (feelings of being emotionally overextended by one's work); and a lack of personal accomplishment (feeling unsuccessful and incompetent in one's teaching abilities) (Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Maslach et al., 2001).

Subsequent theories of burnout have been developed in recent years, but none as robust as Maslach's model. For example, Leon, Halbesleben & Paulsian-Underdahl (2015), proposed a dialectical perspective of burnout which focuses on two dialectical paired, interdependent opposites (in this case burnout and job engagement) to examine dynamic fluctuations between burnout and engagement states within individuals. This theory creates a "platform" to describe the interplay between the state of burnout and its opposite state, job-engagement (Leon et al., 2015). Despite Leon et al. (2015) proposed theory of burnout, the theory is limited to focusing on the construct of engagement as it relates to career. Maslach's three construct subscales of depersonalization, emotional exhaustion, and personal accomplishment are not implemented in Leon et al. (2015) dialectical theory. Additionally, Leon et al. (2015) theory of burnout has only minimal comparison to Maslach's fourth subscale of "involvement" which is included in the MBI-

ES as an optional construct due to its low correlation with the three existing correlates (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Dialectical theory on burnout has additional limitations including its questionable utility in quantitative analyses since current research surrounds qualitative studies. Similarly, its definition of relational constructs as fluid rather than objective and quantifiable, limit its use in validity studies. (Leon et al., 2015).

Another study by Dunford, Boss, Ship, Angermeir and Boss (2012) posited their theory of burnout as dynamic, and one which included three dimensions of burnout as: an entry level dimension (organizational newcomers), lateral dimension (organizational job-changers), and incumbents (organizational insiders). This theory is similar to the MBI-ES in that it expands on existing research on burnout, however it is limited in that it focuses on burnout exclusively regarding career-related transitions and organizational changes (Dunford et al., 2012).

There is a plethora of research on burnout as it relates to special education teachers. For example, the teacher shortage crisis from 1990-2000 led to many classrooms being overcrowded and added additional stress on special education instructors, which led to feeling burned out (Brunsting et al., 2014). Similarly, lack of administrative support, large amounts of paperwork, challenging student behaviors, and limited social support from peers have been documented as factors associated with increased perceptions of burnout in special education instructors (Adera & Bullock, 2010; Brunsting et al., 2014; Slaalvik & Slaalvik, 2007). However, less information is known on if the amount of social support, from administrators, colleagues, and subordinates can effectively predict burnout in special education instructors working in autism-specific

teaching environments. Therefore, this study adopted the SSWS to measure the specific constructs of: emotional reciprocity, feedback from others, appreciation, recognition, ability to take time off when needed, and sharing of duties/responsibilities on the amount of social support provided by administrators, colleagues, and subordinates in predicting burnout in special education teachers working with children with ASD.

## Burnout in General Education Instructors

Burnout in teachers is defined as a cluster of symptoms that depletes an individual's energy, creates cynicism towards administration, peers, and students, increases the potential for attrition, and lessens overall feelings of self-efficacy (Avalos & Valenzuela, 2016; Freudenberger, 1974; Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Symptoms of burnout are dynamic, chronic, occur over time, and result in the debilitating effects experienced by many teachers (Brunsting et al., 2014; Maslach, 1981). Causes of burnout are the result of several issues including: student behavior and disciplinary issues (Adera & Bullock, 2010; Pas et al., 2010), lack of existential satisfaction from their job (Loonstra, et al., 2009; Tomic & Tomic, 2008), occupational and role-related stressors (Antoniou et al., 2013), self-efficacy (Dicke, Marsh, Parker & Kunter, 2014), and issues with social support and school climate (Bataineh & Alsagheer, 2012; Collie, Shapka & Perry, 2012; Kugiejko, 2015; McLean et al., 2017; Suh, 2015).

Similarly, Pas et al. (2010) and Chang (2013) conducted studies on special education on the effects of student misbehavior on instructor self-efficacy, emotional regulation and burnout. Teachers with lower self-efficacy in handling behavioral problems were 23% less likely than their peers to make a referral to the principal's office

to suspend behavioral students (Pas et al., 2010). Additionally, Chang (2013) argued that instructors lacking in problem-solving self-efficacy skills are at an increased risk for feelings of frustration and disillusionment which may lead to lessened feelings of accomplishment. Results from these studies suggested that instructors who are experiencing higher instances of burnout are less likely to discipline students who present with behavior problems and less likely to make appropriate referrals, both of which can impact the overall quality of instruction. Chang (2013) and Pas et al. (2010) studies justify the need for further analysis on what factors may influence this study's criterion variable of burnout.

Knowing the nuances of organizational structure and the school climate are critical for teachers who are susceptible to burnout (Collie et al., 2012; McLean et al., 2017). For example, Gavish and Friedman (2010) posited novice teachers as more susceptible to the experiences of burnout based on a "reality check" with the real world of teaching versus their career ideals. Passion for the field of teaching is often not enough to withstand the feelings of frustration and a lack of connectedness and involvement within the organization, which exacerbates feeling unaccomplished and increases feelings of depersonalization and emotional exhaustion (Chang, 2013; Gavish & Friedman, 2010). These feelings of a lack of interconnectedness within the social climate of an organization provides further justification for examining whom or what factor(s) are responsible for contributing to feelings of burnout, providing additional support for this study.

## Burnout in Special Education Instructors

There is extensive literature which discusses the critical role that special educators have with regard to teaching students with autism and their susceptibility to burnout (Adera & Bullock, 2010; Barry, 2012; Bataineh & Alsagheer, 2012; Brunsting et al., 2014; Folostina & Tudorache, 2012; Hendricks, 2011; Pas et al., 2010; Zarafshan et al., 2013). In addition to the myriad factors shared by both general education and special education instructors regarding burnout, special education teachers often experience additional stressors resulting in an increased susceptibility to the effects of burnout. Many factors influence special education teacher's feelings of burnout, including: inefficient social support (Bataineh & Alsagheer, 2012), job satisfaction and work commitment (Klassen & Chiu, 2011; Pas et al., 2010), self-efficacy, and trait emotional intelligence (Ruble, Usher, McGrew, 2011).

Teachers working exclusively within a special education environment often face unique challenges specific to the populations in which they serve. For example, instructors specializing in autism-specific classrooms must be educated and knowledgeable on individual educational plans (IEPs) and be able to efficiently implement these programs for each student they instruct (Ruble et al., 2011). The increased demands of IEP implementation specific to each child often increases feelings of emotional exhaustion in teachers (Ruble et al., 2011). Special education teachers may experience increased frustration due to their required roles and responsibilities which can increase emotional exhaustion (Ruble et al., 2011). Similarly, feelings of isolation are often experienced when special education instructors feel a lack of support from peers

due to the specialized roles and responsibilities, leading to job dissatisfaction and increasing susceptibility to burnout (Collie et al., 2012).

Core academic impairments associated with children with ASD (i.e., inability to communicate; restricted social interactions; severe behavioral problems) influences a child's ability to efficiently learn and often increases a special education teacher's susceptibility to stress, often resulting in the effects of burnout (Hendricks, 2011; Ruble et al., 2011). Similarly, instructors specializing in teaching children with ASD are often required to be familiar with Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) and must be able to implement these strategies consistently in order to increase a child's positive behavioral support while minimizing the effects of negative behaviors (Hendricks, 2011).

Additional stressors unique to teachers working within a special education environment include students who present with aggressive or self-injurious behaviors. For example, special education teachers are often required to undergo specialized training for use of restraint techniques with severely aggressive or self-injurious students which can influence a teacher's feelings of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization (Brosnan & Healy, 2010). Aggressive and self-injurious students can exacerbate feelings of frustration and impede a special educator's feelings of self-efficacy in adequately performing their job (Hendricks, 2011). These feelings often lead to experiences of burnout, especially when teachers feel isolated from peer support, making the need for this study critical in examining the influences of administrators, peers and subordinates as predictors of burnout.

## Administrator Support

Social support is defined as an act of help or guidance that one individual receives from another through social interaction, and is critical to an organization's functioning (Shankar & Kumar, 2014). Existing research on social support helps provide evidence of its utility in lessening the effects of burnout among special education teachers (Barry, 2012; Basol, 2013; Bataineh, 2009; Billingsley, 2007; Bozonelos, 2008; Etzion, 1984; Suh, 2015). For example, Suh (2015) and Shankar & Kumar 2014) argue the importance of interacting with other professionals to lessen the effects of stress on a teacher's overall health and well-being, which in turn helps minimize their perceptions of burnout. Similarly, a study by Griffith et al. (2014) provided evidence of the how low levels of administrator support reduce feelings of personal accomplishment in special education instructors, leading to feeling burned out.

Administrator support is often heralded as the most powerful, yet often least provided, source of support for teachers. Administrators are the superintendents, principals and vice principals of an educational environment, and those who create and execute the rules, regulations and climate governing a school (Johnson & Sessions, 2015). Administrators hold the ultimate responsibility for everything that occurs within a school's environment including: hiring staff, rewards and reprimands, staff training and evaluation, school budget plans, and developing school curriculums (Johnson & Sessions, 2015). Due to the scope and intensity of their position, administrators are often pulled in many directions throughout the day limiting their availability to interact with their staff, which can leave teachers vulnerable to feelings of burnout (Wheeler & LaRocco, 2009).

Existing research suggests that lack of administrator support is one of the largest predictors of burnout among special education instructors (Cancio et al., 2013). Similarly, the lack of support from administrative staff has created the highest attrition rate for special education teachers among all teaching professions (Cancio et al., 2013). Teachers who are left to figure issues out on their own or to seek help from equally busy peers can leave teachers feeling overwhelmed, frustrated, and alone (Cancio et al., 2013; Suh, 2015).

Early literature regarding administrative support focused on targeting teacher supply while reducing attrition with special education teachers (Cooley & Yavanoff, 1996) while current literature has shifted its focus to teacher retention and reducing burnout (Brunsting et al., 2014). The paradigm has shifted in recent literature to focusing on how teachers are best trained and supported by administrators to minimize perceptions of burnout which can lead to attrition (Brunsting et al., 2014; Sindelar, Brownell & Billingsley, 2012).

Administrator management style can greatly impact perceptions of burnout for special education instructors (Blazer, 2010). For example, a study by Bozonelos (2008) examined both qualitative and quantitative categories of administrator support experienced by special education teachers as predictors of burnout. Results suggested that administrators who focused on four categories of support with their teachers: a) appraisal support, b) emotional support, c) instrumental support and d) informational support, experienced less attrition with their special education instructors suggesting that perceptions of burnout in teachers were reduced. Administrator management styles which

are more collaborative in nature offer a more supportive environment for instructors, which helps reduce feelings of burnout (Billingsley, 2004; Blazer, 2010; Cancio et al., 2013).

An article by Erkutlu, Chafra and Bumin (2011) examined the aggressiveness dimension among administrators at schools using the Organizational Culture Profile (OCP) on administrator leadership style and teacher's perceived job stress. (Erkutlu et al., 2011). Results suggest that more aggressive administrators, characterized by deadlines and limited social interaction with teachers, was positively correlated with job stress in teachers, while lower perceptions of job stress occurred in teachers whose administrators scored lower on the aggressiveness dimension (Erkutlu et al., 2011).

Relational dynamics have been examined in existing research as they relate to job performance. For example, a study by Furunes et al. (2015) focused on administrator-teacher dyads exclusively, using the Leadership-Member Exchange Scale (LMX). Results from this study suggest that administrator styles which foster autonomy and reciprocity between administrator and teacher are necessary for a productive and supportive work environment. However, there are limitations to this study. For example, Furunes et al. (2015) present only seven questions on the questionnaire which focus exclusively on the teacher's opinion of administrator authoritative leadership style (i.e., "Do you know where you stand with your leader?"). The questionnaire does not address situational, emotional, or individual characteristics such as teacher satisfaction with administration or the quality of personal relationships for teachers with administrative staff at work (Furunes et al., 2015). Similarly, based on the type of questions addressed in

the questionnaire, teachers may feel obligated to reply in a socially-acceptable way out of fear of losing their jobs. These limitations provide evidence of the need for further research on the implications of social support from administrators on the perceptions of burnout in teachers. For example, questions which address the feelings and perspectives of instructors towards administrators can provide insight into an organization's climate, and what aspects of the social climate require change (Suh, 2015). SCT theory can be used to foster program development which creates required social networking for subordinates with administrative staff on both qualitative and quantitative dimensions (Bandura, 1986; Bandura, 2001). This in turn can increase overall job satisfaction in subordinates and reduce feelings of burnout.

There are limitations to existing research on the effects of administrator support on burnout in teachers. For example, Bozonelos (2008) study suggested that administrators who provided higher quality support from four categories including: a) appraisal support, b) emotional support, c) instrumental support, and d) informational support, experienced less attrition with their teaching staff, indicating that teachers responded more favorably to higher quality support by administrators, lessening teacher perceptions of burnout. However, the study did not quantitatively address how much of each category of support would be sufficient in reducing perceptions of burnout. Similarly, the study did not address the influences of peer and subordinate staff on perceptions of burnout in teachers (Bozonelos, 2008). Additionally, quantity of administrator feedback was not sufficient in functioning as supportive, where quality of feedback was deemed as more supportive for teachers in reducing perceptions of burnout

leading to attrition (Bozonelos, 2008; Wells, 2017). Future research could examine factors of emotional reciprocity, feedback, appreciation, and recognition from peers and subordinate staff as predictors of burnout in special education teachers.

Schlichte, Yssel, and Merbler (2008) discussed support from administrators as a method of reducing burnout in first-year teachers. Schlichte et al. (2008) used an open-ended questionnaire and interview to obtain opinions from first-year special education instructors on their perceptions of support from school administration and mentoring opportunities. Results from the study found that first-year special education teachers with a more supportive environment (i.e., administrators returning calls in a timely manner with teacher concerns; mentoring and teaching opportunities; encouraging; and befriending) experienced less feelings of burnout than those who reported lower support from administrators. Additional findings suggested that insufficient social support from administrators led to feelings of abandonment and resentment in first-year instructors, which increased perceptions of burnout. While the study qualitatively assessed special education teachers' personal experiences of social support from administrators in their first year of teaching, there are several limitations which should be considered. First, the sample size consisted of only five (5) participants and all were first-year special education instructors, limiting generalizability of findings for more seasoned instructors. Additionally, the construct of burnout was not quantitatively assessed using a standardized questionnaire such as the MBI-ES, so no analyses on the three dimensions of burnout (depersonalization, personal accomplishment, and emotional exhaustion) were conducted, leaving an unanswered question on what dimension of burnout was most

influenced by administrator support. Further examination on administrator support should include quantifiable rating scales which assess several dimensions of administrator support including: emotional reciprocity, feedback, appreciation, recognition and sharing of duties, from a more diverse sample of special education teachers, on perceptions of burnout.

## Colleague Social Support

Most studies have focused on the influence of administrative support on the influences of burnout regarding special education teachers (Billingsley, 2004; Bozonelos, 2008; Brunsting et al., 2014; Cancio et al., 2013). The rationale for focusing on administrative support is simple; administrators are often seen as synonymous with a school's climate, values and norms and responsible for school policies and practices (Wheeler & LaRocco, 2009). However, support from colleagues and subordinates can be equally fulfilling for teachers in minimizing the effects of burnout and is worthy of discussion.

A colleague is defined as another teacher, one of similar status, in which one teacher can turn to another for support, planning, and collaboration (Jones, Youngs & Frank, 2013). There is a modest body of research on the influence of collegial support on the perceptions of burnout among both special and general educators. For example, it has been posited that a school's social climate is imperative for teachers to feel respected, heard, validated, and part of a cohesive team with their peers (Suh, 2015). When collaboration and social/emotional support are limited, feelings of frustration replace a sense of teamwork and unity among staff (Schlichte, et al., 2008). Schlichte et al. (2008)

argued the importance of social collaboration among first year special education teachers as imperative in learning the nuances of an organization in whether newer teachers choose to leave the field. However, social collaboration is equally important to seasoned instructors to help buffer against the effects of burnout (Jones et al., 2013). For example, limited opportunities to collaborate on ideas with peers can increase feelings of emotional exhaustion in both general and special education instructors, resulting in feeling burned out (Blazer, 2010; Jones et al., 2013; Schlichte et al., 2008).

Much of the current research suggests that instructors desire to feel integrated into their social environment and seek collaboration with other peers (Billingsley, Griffin, Smith, Kamman & Isreal, 2009). Unfortunately, up to 79% of instructors experience a school climate that does not support collegial socialization and often includes hostile working conditions which exacerbates stress and feelings of burnout among peers (Billingsley et al., 2009; Sulea, Filipescu, Horga & Fishmann, 2012). It has been posited that part of the issue with collegial collaboration is the result of segregationally-related issues between special educators and general educators (Billingsley et al., 2009; Suh, 2015). For example, special educators have reported their general education peers as being "openly hostile" regarding collaborating on integrating a special education child into a general education environment (Billingsley, 2007).

Mentoring has been proven as an important element in establishing and maintaining collegial relationships among teachers (Schlichte et al., 2008). Experienced educators can provide emotional support and help a newer teacher navigate the sometimes tricky waters of a school's climate while providing quality feedback on

expectations of the job (Schlichte et al., 2008). Unfortunately, few schools select mentors based on the emotional and nurturing needs of instructors, and many mentors only meet with their peers as corrective measures rather than proactively building morale and skills (Billingsley, 2007; Jones et al., 2013; Schlichte et al., 2008).

These studies suggested the impact of social support from colleagues as playing an integral role in minimizing the effects of burnout experienced by special education teachers through task-specific collaboration. However, additional research on social support should examine how emotional reciprocity, appreciation and recognition from peers can influence burnout in special education instructors, justifying the need for this study.

### Subordinate Social Support

The impact of social support from subordinates on the influence of burnout in special education teachers is limited in existing research. This study identified a subordinate as a special education assistant who supports the special education teacher in a classroom environment, where they function as a team, yet work independently in their tasks to teach and assist students (Kratz et al., 2015). One study conducted by Kratz et al. (2015) discussed the implications of workplace cohesion on the impact of burnout in a sample of special education teachers and the teaching assistants working collectively in autism-specific classrooms. Results from their study suggested that teaching assistants felt more cohesiveness with the classroom teacher(s) than vice versa, suggesting that the teaching assistants saw special education teachers in more of an authoritative role in which they provided supervision and feedback to assistants (Kratz et a., 2015). However,

results from this study were subject to positive respondent bias with the teaching assistants (Kratz et al., 2015). Similarly, the study focused exclusively on the cohesive dimension with regard to required job duties. Future research could examine emotional dimensions of social support, including: appreciation, recognition and reciprocity from subordinates as predictors of burnout in special education instructors.

There is no known research on whether teaching assistants or special education instructors interpret the meaningfulness, emotional reciprocity, feelings of recognition, and quality of the other's relationship as predictors of burnout. These limitations were worthy of examination in this study.

## Summary

The literature in this chapter focused on several integral topics: social-cognitive theory (SCT), the historical perspective of burnout, burnout in both general and special education teachers, autism spectrum disorder (ASD), administrator, colleague and subordinate support. Burnout has been extensively researched in both general and special education teachers (Freudenberger, 1974; Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Maslach & Leiter, 1997). Existing research has attempted to find causal variables associated with an increased risk of burnout in both general and special education teachers which include an organization's climate (i.e., values, norms and organizational structure), social support system among staff, job requirements, and physical proximity to others (Blazer, 2010; Suh, 2015). A review of the existing literature suggested burnout as a dynamic phenomenon, one which is exacerbated over time resulting in behavioral, psychological, emotional, and physical symptoms (Freudenberge, 1974; Maslach & Jackson, 1981).

Symptoms can include depression, anxiety, gastrointestinal upset, heart palpitations, sleep disturbances, headaches, apathy, and increased tardiness and absenteeism (Blazer, 2010; Freudeberger, 1974).

Traditionally, the teaching profession as a whole is highly susceptible to the effects of burnout due to the requirements of the job (Maslach, 2001). However, special education teachers are at an increased risk of burnout due to the specialized functions required to perform their jobs such as mastering implementation of Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and learning Applied Behavior Analysis in order to best integrate teaching methodologies to children with autism (Adera & Bullock, 2010; Barry, 2012; Bataineh & Alsagheer, 2012; Brunsting et al., 2014; Folostina & Tudorache, 2012; Hendricks, 2011; Pas et al., 2010; Zarafshan et al., 2013).

There are gaps in current literature surrounding the variable of social support on burnout in special education teachers which include: insufficient examination of situational and individual characteristics surrounding social support, insufficient instruments used for a more comprehensive assessment of social support, and inadequate social support programs which encompass reactive interventions rather than proactive ones (Billingsley et al., 2009; Bozonelos, 2009; Cancio et al., 2013; Furunes et al., 2015). Additionally, a gap exists in current literature on the amount of social support, provided by administrators, colleagues, and subordinates, in individual or linear combination, on adequately predicting the criterion variable of burnout. Focusing on predictors of burnout in this study addressed the gap in existing literature and provided support for program implementation to target both qualitative and quantitative intervention strategies for a

more comprehensive examination on whether social support influences perceptions of burnout in special education teachers.

Chapter 3 will target the methodology and rationale of the study, and will include: the independent predictor variables, the dependent criterion variable, the research design, participant sample, data collection, analysis methodology, and ethical considerations of this study.

# Chapter 3: Research Method

## Introduction

This exploratory quantitative study was conducted to expand on previously conducted research by examining whether the amount of social support provided by administrators, colleagues, and subordinates can adequately predict burnout, the criterion variable under investigation, in a sample of special educators teaching in autism-specific classrooms in Southern California. Information gleaned from this study may help identify the specific factors which predict the level of existence of burnout. This chapter includes the following sections: introduction, research method and design, population, participants, sampling procedures, data collection, MBI-ES, SSWS (modified), data analysis, threats to validity, ethical procedures, and summary.

## Research Method and Design

In this study, I employed a survey research design and exploratory multiple linear regression (MLR) analysis to examine the relationship among three variables, perceived social support provided by administrators, colleagues, and subordinates, as potential predictors of burnout (depersonalization, emotional exhaustion, and personal accomplishment) in a sample of special education instructors.

Exploratory MLR was appropriate for this study because it is designed to examine the relationship between the three predictor variables of social support from administrators, colleagues, and subordinates, against each subscale (depersonalization, emotional exhaustion, and personal accomplishment) of burnout (Field, 2009; Frankfort-Namchias & Namchias, 2008). According to Frankfort-Namchias and Namchias (2008),

researchers in the social sciences commonly use regression analysis to find an algebraic expression by which to represent a functional linear relationship among the variables being analyzed. MLR is a way of predicting a criterion (dependent variable) from one or more predictor (independent) variables and allows a researcher to go a step beyond correlational studies in actually predicting a response based on the predictor variables (Field, 2009; Frankfort-Namchias & Namchias, 2008).

The MBI-ES (Maslach & Jackson, 1986), a modified version of the SSWS (Etzion, 1984), a demographics questionnaire, and an informed consent letter were completed by all participants. Data from the questionnaires were compiled for statistical analysis using SPSS in which three MLR analyses were performed using the three predictor variables of administrators, colleagues, and subordinates, against each subscale of burnout on the MBI-ES: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment. Analyses conducted through SPSS are both time and resource-friendly as the raw data gathered from participants were easily be inputted into SPSS for immediate statistical analyses. Linear regression was appropriate for advancing existing knowledge on burnout experienced by special education instructors since regression analyses can be both valid and reliable at predicting the likelihood of an outcome based on the predictor variable(s).

## Population

Southern California public school teachers, specifically special education teachers at the K to 6 grade level, are the target population of interest in this study. California (2015) defined a public school as being supported by public funding, employing

credentialed teachers who provide instruction, and providing educational opportunities for all students who are enrolled. The public school system in California is typically categorized into three groups, including elementary schools, also known as Kindergarten through sixth grade (K-6), junior high schools (7th and 8th grade), and high schools (9th – 12th grade). Statistics show the state of California as funding 526 public elementary (K-6) school districts, which are regionalized into 5,825 elementary (K-6) schools within its 58 counties (California Department of Education, 2016). There are a reported 138,890 elementary (K-6) school teachers employed by the public school system within the state of California. Based on statistics, 7%, or 9,741 special education elementary school teachers work in Southern California within 3,437 elementary schools throughout eight counties: Santa Barbara (144 teachers), Ventura (260 teachers), Los Angeles (3,420 teachers), Orange (2,580 teachers), Riverside (870 teachers), San Bernardino (890 teachers), San Diego (1,493 teachers), and Imperial (84 teachers; Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016; California Department of Education, 2016).

Of the 9,741 currently employed special education (K-6) instructors within Southern California, 74% self-reported as female and 26% as male. The majority of instructors identified as White, with statistics reporting 64% for female and 65% for male instructors. Those identifying as Hispanic ranged from 18% for females and 19% for males (California Department of Education, 2016). The remaining percentage of instructors included African American (5% for females and 6% for males), Asian (8% for females and 5% for males), and two or more races or "no response" as 5% for females and 5% for males (California Department of Education, 2016). These instructors work

with a variety of students who present with a wide range of disabilities, including physical, emotional, behavioral, social, and intellectual (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015). Of all reported disabilities, ASD has seen a 7% increase in diagnoses since 2001. Statistics have shown as many as 90,794 students, or 12.6% (or approximately 1 in 8) children currently enrolled in special education classes in California, have a diagnosis of ASD. In order for the sample of special education elementary school teachers to be robust, participants were asked to complete a small demographics questionnaire, including their age, nationality, and gender.

## Participants

Participants consisted of a sample of approximately 100 special education elementary (K-6) school instructors within Southern California. Both male and female participants were recruited for participation. Participant ethnicity and gender were asked in the demographics questionnaire in order to obtain a sample of special education instructors within California. Qualifying participants were currently employed at a Southern California state-funded public elementary (K-6) school as a special education instructor and had at least one child with a diagnosis of ASD in their class. SurveyMonkey was used for the participant recruitment process. Participants who met the predetermined criteria were contacted and asked if they would like to participate in this study.

## Sampling Procedures

A stratified random sampling procedure was employed to recruit qualifying participants (see Frankfort-Namchias & Namchias, 2008). Stratified random sampling

was appropriate for this type of research as the information sought was specific to special education instructors and their experiences with burnout within the Southern California region (see Creswell, 2009; Frankfort-Namchias & Namchias, 2008). SurveyMonkey.com was used for participants to complete the surveys for this study and was based on a voluntary basis. Only special education instructors who teach at the K to 6 grade level within Southern California and who currently have at least one child with autism in their class were invited to participate in this study.

In order to determine a robust sample size suitable for the analysis in this study, the alpha level, effect size, and statistical power were selected *a priori* (see Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007). A power analysis was conducted to determine sample size using G*Power 3, with an alpha level set at .05, a medium effect size ($R^2$ = .20), and statistical power set to .80 (Faul et al., 2007). Based on the results of the analysis, a sample size of at least 59 participants was necessary for conducting a statistically valid MLR with three predictor variables against one criterion variable, However, in order to include a more robust representative sample, 100 participants were selected for this study in which a ratio calculation divided the number of special education teachers working within each county by the total number of special education teachers within Southern California to include Santa Barbara (2%, 2 participants), Ventura (3%, 3 participants), Los Angeles (35%, 31 participants), Orange (26%, 23 participants). Riverside (9%; 8 participants). San Bernardino (9%, 8 participants). San Diego (15%, 14 participants), and Imperial (1%, 1 participant; Faul et al., 2007; Field, 2009; Gravetter & Wallnau, 2009).

## Data Collection

Data were collected on participants using SurveyMonkey.com. SurveyMonkey is an encrypted, secured online website for professional researchers and students that gathers data from millions of participants on a variety of topics. The website uses SSL encryption to ensure that participant data remain anonymous, encrypted from potential data breach, and create a secure connection between the participants' responses and the server. To qualify for this study, participants had to be currently employed as a special education instructor within Southern California and must have had at least one child with autism currently enrolled in their class. SurveyMonkey was used to recruit qualified participants interested in completing this study who met the predetermined criteria. A link to the surveys was provided by SurveyMonkey to qualifying participants who met the predetermined criteria of working in Southern California as a special education instructor, with at least one pupil currently enrolled in their class who had an autism diagnosis. Participants then clicked the link provided and completed their anonymous responses to the surveys, which were stored by SurveyMonkey and provided to me for analysis.

One questionnaire was uploaded onto SurveyMonkey along with an informed consent form. Qualified special education instructors were currently employed in Southern California and had at least one child with an autism diagnosis in their class. In order to eliminate disqualified participants, skip logic data were used through SurveyMonkey to remove participants who were unwilling to sign the informed consent form. Those participants unwilling to electronically sign the informed consent form were

skipped to the end of the survey, thanking them for their time. The two scales of measurement and demographic questionnaire were available on SurveyMonkey to qualifying special education instructors within California, regardless of their location or years of experience teaching in special education. Participants who had an existing SurveyMonkey account or who wanted to create an account were notified by SurveyMonkey if they met the required criteria to complete this study's surveys. Participants were asked to read, acknowledge, and electronically sign an informed consent form and complete one self-administered questionnaire, beginning with the modified version of the SSWS (Etzion, 1984); secondly, the MBI-ES (Maslach & Jackson, 1986), and lastly, a small demographics questionnaire. The questionnaire took no more than 25 minutes to complete, and participants were informed at the conclusion of the questionnaire with exiting instructions. Responses to the informed consent form and the questionnaire were collected anonymously and stored within their encrypted SSL site. Since the use of deception was not used in this research, no debriefing was necessary. However, all participants were required to read and electronically sign the informed consent form, which explained the study in detail and their option to leave at any time during the survey without penalty.

The instruments used in this study were chosen based on their appropriateness for use with the participant sample and the variables being examined. For example, a demographics questionnaire asked participants questions relating to their age, ethnicity, number of children with a diagnosis of ASD in their classroom, and number of years teaching special education to obtain a sample from the population of special education

instructors within California. A modified version of the SSWS was administered to special education instructors measuring the amount of social support they perceive from: administrators, colleagues, and subordinates (Etzion, 1984). Lastly, The MBI-ES was chosen for this study as it is specific to educators and measures three primary constructs commonly associated with teacher burnout, including: personal accomplishment, depersonalization and emotional exhaustion (Maslach, 1981; Maslach & Jackson, 1981).

## Instrumentation and Operationalization of Constructs

### MBI-ES

The MBI-ES (Appendix A) was developed by Maslach and Jackson (1986) as a modified version of the original Maslach Burnout Inventory Human Services Survey (MBI-HSS) (Maslach et al., 1996). The MBI-ES is specific to instructors, whereas the MBI-HSS is geared towards professionals in the human services sector including those working in social work, criminal justice, mental health and the healthcare industries. Both versions of the MBI are structurally and functionally identical, with the exception that the MBI-ES uses the word *"student"* instead of *"recipient"* to ensure clarity in responding for instructors (Maslach, 1981; Maslach et al., 1996).

The MBI-ES is a 22-item questionnaire that measures the affective, or psychological dimension of burnout and includes three subscales: a) Emotional exhaustion, b) depersonalization, and c) reduced personal accomplishment. There are 9 items within the emotional exhaustion subscale which describe feelings of being emotionally depleted at work, 5 items within the depersonalization subscale relating to interpersonal cynicism and devaluation, and 8 items relating to feelings of personal

competence. The same administration technique and scoring key are used for the MBI-ES as the original MBI-HSS (Maslach et al., 1996).

The MBI-ES utilizes 7-point Likert scale which measures frequency and intensity of attitude(s) towards work-related experiences. Scores on the frequency scale range from 0, *never,* to 6, *daily*. Scores of 0 are indicated when a respondent checks a separate box indicating they never experience the attitude being measured. High levels of burnout are indicated by high scores on both the Emotional exhaustion and depersonalization subscales. Feelings of personal accomplishment are negatively correlated with burnout, indicating that a low score on the personal accomplishment subscale suggests a high level of burnout (Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Maslach et al., 1996).

Reliability coefficients have been substantiated for the MBI-ES. Iwanicki and Schwab (1981) reported Cronbach's alpha estimates as .90 for emotional exhaustion, .76 for depersonalization and .76 for personal accomplishment. Similarly, Gold (1984) reported Cronbach's alphas of .88, .74 and .72, respectively. These scores are similar to the original MBI-HSS with reliability coefficients of .90 for emotional exhaustion, .79 for depersonalization, and .71 for personal accomplishment providing evidence of the utility and reliability of the MBI-ES (Maslach et al., 1996).

Inter-correlations obtained on the MBI-ES from a sample of educators in Cyprus were in line with the hypothesized direction(s) of Emotional exhaustion correlating positively with depersonalization and both emotional exhaustion and depersonalization correlating negatively with personal accomplishment. These findings provided evidence of discriminant validity for each of the three subscales as measuring a discrete aspect of

burnout (Kokkinos, 2006). Similarly, discriminant validity of the MBI-ES has been confirmed by measuring it against the Job Diagnostic Survey (JDS) which measures experiences of dissatisfaction with one's job. Results indicated that less than 6% of variance was accounted for by the correlations, indicating that the three subscales of burnout are independent constructs unrelated to experiences of job dissatisfaction (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). The MBI-ES has additionally demonstrated good internal consistency and has been well-documented in several studies within different countries and different languages (Schaufeli, Daamen & Van Mierlo, 1994).

All three scale scores (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment) were summed individually. Scores were measured using a 7-point Likert Scale for all answers in each of the three subscales. Upon summing the scores for each of the subscales, scores were measured as the following: a) emotional exhaustion (scores closer to 63 = higher levels of burnout); b) depersonalization (scores closer to 35 = higher levels of burnout; c) personal accomplishment (scores closer to 56 = *less* feelings of burnout). The personal accomplishment subscale is scored in the opposite direction from the emotional exhaustion and depersonalization subscales, indicating that higher scores on this scale suggest less feelings of burnout (Maslach, 1981).

**SSWS (modified)**

The SSWS (Appendix B) was developed by Dalia Etzion (1984) to assess specific factors in a person's work and home life that affect the probability of developing burnout including stressors within the workplace (i.e., sharing of duties; relationships with supervisors, peers and subordinates) and environmental pressures (the ability to take time

off when needed). The original sample of 657 Israeli human service managers and professionals included both females (n = 374) and males (n = 283) with a mean age of 32 for females and 39 for males. The original version of the SSWS originally included 9 items on a 7-point Likert scale in which seven of the items corresponded to features associated with the degree of social support present in their work and home lives (feedback from others; appreciation; recognition; opportunity to take time off when needed; sharing of duties and responsibilities; and emotional reciprocity (Etzion, 1984). Low scores of 1 or 2 indicate low levels (*very little*) support, scores of 3, 4 and 5 indicate moderate levels of support (*moderately*), and scores of 6 and 7 indicate high levels of support (*very much*). The remaining three items correspond to the quality of the relationship(s) the participants perceive with their supervisors, coworkers and subordinates and in their personal lives with their spouses, family and friends (Etzion, 1984). Cronbach's alpha estimates of .74 for work support and .80 for life support, with a correlation between the two, $r = .35$ suggesting that there is a moderate positive correlation between support at work and support at home on the probability of developing burnout (Field, 2009). Existing research has validated the utility of this instruments' reliability and consistency in cross-comparison studies (Carlson & Perrewe, 1999; Etzion, 1988; Etzion & Bailyn, 1994).

In this study, responses were measured along the same weighted 7-point Likert scale Etzion used in the original study (1984). Similarly, the modified study used the same levels of (a) emotional reciprocity (b) feedback from others (c) appreciation (d) recognition (e) ability to take time off when needed, and (f) sharing of

duties/responsibilities as originally proposed by Etzion (1984) in order to maintain the instrument's psychometric properties. Modifications included changing the original instrument from 2 response options of: a) in your work and b) your life outside of work, to 3 response options of a) administrators b) colleagues and c) subordinates to reflect working relationships among teachers in a special education teaching environment. The other modification includes using 8 of the 9 original English-translated questions (questions 1 – 8) as the final question (question 9) relates exclusively to family life outside of work, in which this study did not analyze. Responses were summed with one score for each predictor variable (administrators, colleagues, subordinates), for each of the 8 questions, with scores ranging from 7 to 1 for each question. The three predictor variables were individually scored by summing the total number for each question, in order to obtain one final score for each variable. Scores closer to 56 were measured as having "high" social support, and scores closer to "8" were measured as "low" social support.

**Demographics Questionnaire**

I designed a demographics questionnaire (see Appendix C) which was included to gather demographic information on the participants and to ensure potential participants met the inclusion criteria governing this study-- special education teachers currently employed in the public (K-6) education system within Southern California with at least one child with autism currently enrolled in their class. The demographics questionnaire contained 6 questions including: (1) how many years' experience teaching in a special education environment; (2) the number of children currently enrolled in their class with a

diagnosis of Autism; participant (3) age; (4) gender; (5) ethnicity and (6) county in which they teach (Santa Barbara, Ventura, Los Angeles, Orange County, San Bernardino, Riverside, San Diego or Imperial). Scoring was on a continuous scale for questions such as age and number of years teaching in special education.

## Data Analysis

Exploratory MLR analysis was performed to examine each of the following research questions and their associated hypotheses for this study:

RQ1: Does the amount of social support provided by administrators, colleagues, and subordinates, as measured by scores on the modified SSWS, individually or in linear combination adequately predict depersonalization as measured by scores on the MBI-ES among special education teachers in Southern California working with children with ASD?

$H1a_0$: The amount of social support provided by administrators, colleagues, and subordinates, as measured by scores on the modified SSWS, individually or in linear combination, do not adequately predict depersonalization as measured by scores on the MBI-ES among special education teachers in Southern California working with children with ASD.

$H1a_1$: The amount of social support provided by administrators, colleagues, and subordinates, as measured by scores on the modified SSWS, individually or in linear combination, do adequately predict depersonalization as measured by scores on the MBI-ES among special education teachers working in Southern California with children with ASD.

RQ2: Does the amount of social support provided by administrators, colleagues, and subordinates, as measured by scores on the modified SSWS, individually or in linear combination adequately predict emotional exhaustion as measured by scores on the MBI-ES among special education teachers in Southern California working with children with ASD?

*H*2b$_0$: The amount of social support provided by administrators, colleagues, and subordinates, as measured by scores on the modified SSWS, individually or in linear combination, do not adequately predict emotional exhaustion as measured by scores on the MBI-ES among special education teachers working in Southern California with children with ASD.

*H*2b$_1$: The amount of social support provided by administrators, colleagues, and subordinates, as measured by scores on the modified SSWS, individually or in linear combination, do adequately predict emotional exhaustion as measured by scores on the MBI-ES among special education teachers working in Southern California with children with ASD.

RQ3: Does the amount of social support provided by administrators, colleagues, and subordinates, as measured by scores on the modified SSWS, individually or in linear combination adequately predict lessened feelings of personal accomplishment as measured by scores on the MBI-ES among special education teachers in Southern California working with children with ASD?

*H*3c$_0$: The amount of social support provided by administrators, colleagues, and subordinates, as measured by scores on the modified SSWS, individually or in linear

combination, do not adequately predict lessened feelings of personal accomplishment as measured by scores on the MBI-ES among special education teachers working in Southern California with children with ASD.

$H3c_1$: The amount of social support provided by administrators, colleagues, and subordinates, as measured by scores on the modified SSWS, individually or in linear combination, do adequately predict lessened feelings of personal accomplishment as measured by scores on the MBI-ES among special education teachers working in Southern California with children with ASD.

Raw data were collected from participants through SurveyMonkey and I was alerted by SurveyMonkey of completed surveys as they became available. Data preparation included compiling raw scores from completed questionnaires into SPSS in which participant responses were computed and analyzed. Model assumptions were tested using SPSS Statistics 24.0 program for analysis (SPSS; IBM Corporation, 2016) to ensure that each assumption of MLR is met. A series of three exploratory MLRs were performed to test the three null hypotheses, potentially retain the alternate hypotheses and to ultimately answer the three research questions. Each analysis included three predictor variables (administrators, colleagues, and subordinates) and one criterion variable -- one of the three measured burnout subscales (emotional exhaustion; depersonalization; personal accomplishment). A minimum significance level of .05 was adopted for the regression analysis prior to analyzing the three regression coefficients for statistical significance. Each coefficient was required to have a minimum *p*-value of .05 for statistical significance. Since the three predictor variables and the criterion variable are

continuous scales of measurement, using MLR analysis was the most appropriate statistical procedure in examining the strength and direction of the three predictor variables against each subscale of the criterion variable (Field, 2009; Gravetter & Wallnau, 2009).

Responses to the demographics questionnaire were added into SPSS using a dummy variable of '1' for male and '2' for female to transform them from categorical variables for analysis of male and female participants. Continuous variables such as years of experience were imputed into SPSS for analysis of means and standard deviations. All variables from both surveys and demographics questionnaire were assessed for extreme data points to ensure that possible outliers are controlled for and any outlier data were removed which may influence results (Gravetter & Wallnau, 2009). Extreme data points, or outliers, are the data values that deviate significantly from values which were obtained from other participants (Gravetter & Wallnau, 2009). For example, in this research, an outlier may have included a participant who reported an excessively high or low age bracket compared to the mean age of participants. While there is no way to control for participant responses, analyzing data on a scatterplot was used to minimize the risk of inflated correlations and potentially invalid results (Gravetter & Wallnau, 2009).

Prior to beginning the statistical analyses in SPSS, data were analyzed for correctness and validity using the assumptions associated with exploratory MLR. According to Field (2009) assumptions include: homoscedasticity, multicollinearity, normality and linearity. Homoscedasticity of data indicate that the data should hover around zero in a random array of data dots; otherwise if data tend to fan outward then this

assumption has been violated. To check for homoscedasticity in data, scatter plots were created for each pair of predictor and criterion variables (Field, 2009). Multicollinearity in data make it challenging to assess the individual importance of each predictor variable due to the predictor variables being too closely related (Laureate Education, 2009). Multicollinearity can be checked by using the Durbin-Watson test to ensure that residuals are not too closely correlated. Similarly, the VIF (Variance Inflation Factor) was used in SPSS to test if there is too close of a linear relationship among predictor variables. Normality in data refers to a distribution of scores where the mean equals the median equals the mode, and includes a bell-shaped curve (Laureate Education, 2009). When outliers are present, they can skew data leading to data that is kurtotic. Kurtotic data were normalized by taking the logarithm, square root, inverse or the non-normal variables by using the compute function in SPSS (Laureate Education, 2009). The assumption of linearity suggests that the relationship(s) among predictor and criterion variables should follow a relatively straight line. Data which are curved on the graph suggest that the assumption of linearity has been violated. Scatterplots of the pairs of variables were examined to test for linearity in data (Field, 2009).

## Threats to Validity

There are two types of validity which can influence research results and threaten conclusions gleaned from a study: internal validity and external validity (Creswell, 2009). Internal validity includes the ability of a researcher to draw correct inferences from data collected, irrespective of threats, including the instrumentation used and attrition (Campbell & Stanley, 1963; Creswell, 2009). For example, instruments or surveys

chosen by a researcher should be in line with the chosen participant sample, and the independent and dependent variable(s) chosen for analysis. To reduce the threat to internal validity, the MBI-ES was chosen as it is specific to burnout in educators, as well as a modified version of the SSWS, which was modified to include administrators, colleagues, and subordinates – all of which are commonly found within a school environment. Researchers should be aware that selecting participants based on certain characteristics can compromise internal validity, such as participant selection based on employment type or industry, which included special education instructors recruited for this study. Similarly, there is no way for a me to know how many participants may choose to leave the study before completing it, thus, I recruited a large enough sample to account for possible participant attrition (Campbell & Stanley, 1963; Creswell, 2009). To account for the potential of attrition, a robust sample size was used in this study in order to minimize threats to internal validity. To account for the potential of response biases by participants (i.e. social desirability) or the potential for researcher bias, participants completed the surveys online from their computer and did not have access to me, to other participants, or to their responses.

A threat to external validity was my limitation in generalizing findings from this study to the population. This phenomenon can occur due to an interaction among the setting, participants, or timing of the research (see Creswell, 2009). For example, researchers using a specific sample of participants from the population should be cautious in reporting results which may not generalize to other groups (see Creswell, 2009). For this study, findings were limited to special education instructors within California. Thus,

in order to minimize the threat to external validity, findings should be specific to the sample obtained, with implications for future research explicitly stated within the results.

## Ethical Procedures

In order to be compliant with Walden University standards and Federal Regulations regarding human participants, Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was sought and confirmed prior to collecting data, with approval number: 09-27-17-0237275 (Walden University, 2016). Participants were required to read and electronically sign the informed consent form and respond to a series of two instruments and a small demographics questionnaire on SurveyMonkey which took no more than 30 minutes to complete. The informed consent form was required to be electronically signed by participants prior to beginning the study. Skip Logic data were used through SurveyMonkey to disqualify participants who were unwilling to provide their consent to participate.

Participants were advised that their participation is anonymous and completely voluntary and could withdraw at any time without penalty. The potential for harm was addressed on the informed consent form. Participants were advised that there is no risk of physical harm from participating in this study, and that there was the potential for psychological, social, legal and/or economic risk. For example, participants may have felt psychologically vulnerable in answering certain questions, or may have felt nervous that their responses could socially, economically or legally jeopardize their career if an administrator or colleague were to find out. The potential for these risks posed no greater threat to participants than participation in other SurveyMonkey studies and responses

were maintained within SurveyMonkey's secured SSL encrypted server to protect anonymity. SurveyMonkey's use of encrypted data allowed for participants to anonymously respond to the survey where any identifying information (i.e. email address, name, IP address) was removed from the results and the responses. This provided a two-fold security measure for anonymity; their information remained secure with SurveyMonkey, and no identifying information was exchanged when completing the surveys.

Privacy practices associated with this study were addressed in the informed consent form and included: the type of personal information collected (age, gender, nationality, how many years' teaching and how many children with an autism diagnosis are currently enrolled in their class); how their responses were used in data collection; and that responses were not disclosed to anyone else. No personal identifying information was collected such as name, email address, or physical address. Participants' anonymous responses were kept in the strictest confidence prior to, during, and after data collection and all data have been stored on SurveyMonkey's private SSL secured server for 12 calendar months and accessible only by me, with password protection.

Electronic survey responses are stored in a password protected data file. The data file was created and stored on a password encrypted laptop, and the laptop is stored and secured within a locked environment when not in use. When in use, confidential data files were accessed when I was alone, to ensure anonymity and privacy of sensitive information. Electronic data files will be stored for a minimum of 5 years to be ethically

compliant. After 5 years, electronic data files will be thoroughly deleted from the laptop (HHS, 2009; Walden University, 2016).

## Summary

Chapter 3 discussed this quantitative study in examining whether there was a statistically significant relationship among the three predictor variables of social support from administrators, colleagues, and subordinates on the criterion variable of burnout in special education instructors. This study recruited a sample of 100 special education instructors throughout Southern California who had at least one child with a diagnosis of autism in their classroom. Qualified participants were recruited through SurveyMonkey and asked to read and electronically sign the informed consent form, the modified SSWS, the MBI-ES and a small demographics questionnaire. Data analysis included compiling raw scores from the modified SSWS and the MBI-ES into IBM SPSS Statistics 24.0 program for analysis (SPSS; IBM Corporation, 2016) for running several multiple regression analyses on the predictor variables of social support against the criterion variable of burnout. Chapter 4 will discuss the results of the data analysis from this study in more detail, including data collection, post hoc analyses, evaluation of statistical assumptions used and graphical illustrations to support results.

# Chapter 4: Results

## Introduction

This exploratory quantitative analysis was conducted to examine the relationships among three levels of social support from administrators, colleagues, and subordinates on the dependent variable of burnout (depersonalization, emotional exhaustion, and personal accomplishment) in special education instructors teaching in autism-specific classrooms within Southern California. In this study, I used a modified version of the SSWS created by Etzion (1984) to measure social support and the MBI-ES (Maslach & Jackson, 1986) to measure burnout. MLR was an appropriate analysis for use with this study, as it is designed to examine relationships among predictor variables of social support (administrators, colleagues, and subordinates) against each dependent variable subscale (depersonalization, emotional exhaustion, and personal accomplishment) of burnout. There were three research questions and their associated hypotheses that guided this study:

RQ1: Does the amount of social support provided by administrators, colleagues, and subordinates, as measured by scores on the modified SSWS, individually or in linear combination adequately predict depersonalization as measured by scores on the MBI-ES among special education teachers in Southern California working with children with ASD?

$H1a_0$: The amount of social support provided by administrators, colleagues, and subordinates, as measured by scores on the modified SSWS, individually or in linear combination, do not adequately predict depersonalization as measured by scores on the

MBI-ES among special education teachers in Southern California working with children with ASD.

*H*1a$_1$: The amount of social support provided by administrators, colleagues, and subordinates, as measured by scores on the modified SSWS, individually or in linear combination, do adequately predict depersonalization as measured by scores on the MBI-ES among special education teachers working in Southern California with children with ASD.

RQ2: Does the amount of social support provided by administrators, colleagues, and subordinates as measured by scores on the modified SSWS, individually or in linear combination adequately predict emotional exhaustion as measured by scores on the MBI-ES among special education teachers in Southern California working with children with ASD?

*H*2b$_0$: The amount of social support provided by administrators, colleagues, and subordinates, as measured by scores on the modified SSWS, individually or in linear combination, do not adequately predict emotional exhaustion as measured by scores on the MBI-ES among special education teachers working in Southern California with children with ASD.

*H*2b$_1$: The amount of social support provided by administrators, colleagues, and subordinates, as measured by scores on the modified SSWS, individually or in linear combination, do adequately predict emotional exhaustion as measured by scores on the MBI-ES among special education teachers working in Southern California with children with ASD.

RQ3: Does the amount of social support provided by administrators, colleagues, and subordinates, as measured by scores on the modified SSWS, individually or in linear combination adequately predict lessened feelings of personal accomplishment as measured by scores on the MBI-ES among special education teachers in Southern California working with children with ASD?

$H3c_0$: The amount of social support provided by administrators, colleagues, and subordinates, as measured by scores on the modified SSWS, individually or in linear combination, do not adequately predict lessened feelings of personal accomplishment as measured by scores on the MBI-ES among special education teachers working in Southern California with children with ASD.

$H3c_1$: The amount of social support provided by administrators, colleagues, and subordinates, as measured by scores on the modified SSWS, individually or in linear combination, do adequately predict lessened feelings of personal accomplishment as measured by scores on the MBI-ES among special education teachers working in Southern California with children with ASD.

In Chapter 4, I present the data collection process, characteristics of the sample, reliability, assumption testing, and analyses and results. I conclude the chapter with a summary of the research findings.

## Data Collection

The application to carry out the research was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB approval 09-27-17-0237275) on September 27, 2017 to allow enough time for participants to be recruited from the eight counties. The survey itself

took approximately 20 minutes for participants to complete. To minimize the potential for attrition and to ensure that the questionnaire was completed in its entirety, only completed surveys were analyzed. Data collected did not include any discrepancies from the originally presented plan and included 127 surveys returned by participants within the eight counties from approximately 2,696 emails that were sent. After data were cleaned to remove surveys with 0 children with autism reported in class, and/or incomplete surveys, a total of 94 completed participant surveys remained and were analyzed in SPSS 24, including Santa Barbara county ($n$ = 2 participants), Ventura county ($n$ = 3 participants), Los Angeles county ($n$ = 31 participants), Orange county ($n$ = 24 participants), Riverside county ($n$ = 9 participants), San Bernardino county ($n$ = 9 participants), San Diego county ($n$ = 14 participants), and Imperial county ($n$ = 2 participants). Surveys were scored based on scales provided to ensure accuracy. Based on a-priori analysis using G*Power 3, 59 participants were needed for statistical significance, indicating the sample size was large enough to identify statistically significant relationships within the regression analyses (see Faul et al., 2007).

## Sample Characteristics

### Demographics

Ninety-four special education instructors at the K to 6$^{th}$ grade level in Southern California were recruited for this study. The target population included male and female adults, ages 18 and older, who were employed either full-time or part-time as a special education instructor in Southern California, with at least one child with autism in their class. Descriptive demographic statistics included the following: number of years

teaching special education, number of children with autism in class, gender, age, ethnicity, and county in which they teach.

Years teaching special education ranged from new to the field (less than 1 year teaching special education) to 39 years of teaching experience, with a mean average of 13.12 years teaching special education (*SD* = 9.41). Participants reported a minimum of one student currently enrolled in their class with autism and a maximum of 18 students currently enrolled with autism, with an average of four students currently enrolled (*SD* = 3.15).

As shown in Table 1, females included 84 participants and comprised 89.4% of the sample; eight reported being male (8.5%), and two preferred not to respond (2.1%). These statistics differ from the population parameters of 74% female and 26% male, which may influence generalizability of findings. Nearly three-fourths of the sample identified as White (*n* = 69; 73.4%), followed by Hispanic (*n* = 15; 16%), Asian (*n* = 4, 4.3%), Other (Alaskan native, Native American, Other Native; *n* = 3; 3.2%), declined to respond (*n* = 2, 2.1%), and Black (*n* = 1, 1%). Ages ranged from 18 to 24 years (*n* = 2; 2.1%), 25 to 34 years (*n* = 16; 17%), 35 to 44 years (*n* = 25, 26.6%), 45 to 54 years (*n* = 23, 24.5%), 55 to 64 years (*n* = 24; 25.5%), and 65 years and older (*n* = 4, 4.3%). Characteristics of the sample differed from the general population of special education instructors at the K to 6$^{th}$ grade level within Southern California in that 74% self-reported as female and 26% as male within the general population (California Department of Education, 2016). The differences between sample characteristics and the general population may limit generalizability of findings or the ability to extrapolate findings

among gender differences. Similarly, the general population identified as 64% White, 18% Hispanic, 8% Asian, 5% Black, and 5% two or more races and/or “Decline to Respond” (California Department of Education, 2016), which differed from the sample characteristics outlined below in Table 1.

**Table 1**

Table 1

*Descriptive Statistics on the Demographics of the Sample*

| Variable | | *n* | % |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gender | Female | 84 | 89.4 |
| | Male | 8 | 8.5 |
| | Declined to Respond | 2 | 2.1 |
| | Total | 94 | 100 |
| Ethnicity | White | 69 | 73.4 |
| | Hispanic | 15 | 16 |
| | Asian | 4 | 4.3 |
| | Other (Native) | 3 | 3.2 |
| | Declined to Respond | 2 | 2.1 |
| | Black | 1 | 1 |
| | Total | 94 | 100 |
| Age in years | 18-24 | 2 | 2.1 |
| | 25-34 | 16 | 17 |
| | 35-44 | 25 | 26.6 |
| | 45-54 | 23 | 24.5 |
| | 55-64 | 24 | 25.5 |
| | 65+ | 4 | 4.3 |
| | Total | 94 | 100 |
| Number of students with ASD | 1-3 Students | 49 | 52 |
| | 4-7 Students | 30 | 32 |
| | 8-10 Students | 12 | 13 |
| | 11+ Students | 3 | 3 |
| | Total | 94 | 100 |

## Descriptives for Study Variables

The three independent variables used in testing the hypotheses in the study were adapted from the original Social Support at Work Scales (SSWS). The first 8 questions in the original version of the SSWS were used in the modified version, with the exception of the final question, which could not be translated from Hebrew. Response options in the modified version were changed to reflect the response option in question 8 used in the original version: administrators, colleagues, and subordinates, making it specific to work environment (see Appendix B). The modified SSWS was scored as the original version, using a Likert scale of 1-7, with higher scores suggesting higher levels of social support (Etzion, 1984). The mean of the mean scores on the SSWS for administrator support were 4.31 (*SD* = 1.56); colleague support 3.59 (*SD* = 1.48); and subordinate support 3.68 (*SD* = 1.60), indicating special education instructors felt *moderately* supported by administrators, colleagues, and subordinates in their job, with the most perceived support coming from administrators. The mean scores for each variable subscale were obtained in SPSS by using variable total scores from the raw data. Total scores were then transformed in SPSS using the compute variable option to obtain the means, which were used in the regression analyses.

The three dependent variable subscales (depersonalization, emotional exhaustion, and personal accomplishment) used in testing the hypotheses in the study were taken from the Maslach Burnout Inventory Educator's Survey (MBI-ES) (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Answers on the MBI-ES were scored on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 0 to 6, with "0" indicating *never,* and "6" indicating *every day* (Maslach & Jackson, 1981).

Mean scores for the three variable subscales (depersonalization, emotional exhaustion, and personal accomplishment) were obtained in SPSS by using variable total scores, which were then transformed using the compute variable option in SPSS, and then used in the analyses. Higher scores on the Likert scale indicated higher perceived experiences of depersonalization and emotional exhaustion. Personal accomplishment scores were interpreted in the opposite direction from depersonalization and emotional exhaustion, indicating higher scores on the personal accomplishment subscale with higher overall perceptions of personal accomplishment in their job.

The mean score for special education instructors on the MBI-ES depersonalization subscale was 1.23 (*SD* = 1.12) indicating that experiences of depersonalization occurred *a few times a year or less* on average. The emotional exhaustion mean was 3.42 (*SD* = 1.42), indicated that on average, special education instructors experienced feeling emotionally exhausted from their jobs *a few times a month.* Feelings of personal accomplishment tended to occur *a few times a week* on average, with the mean score of 5.01 (SD = .58).

Minimum and maximum scores were analyzed for outliers in the data. An outlier was found in one participant response on the depersonalization subscale, with a mean score of 5.40. The analyses were ran both with, and without the outlier and did not change the results of the analyses, so the outlier was left in the data and analyses.

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics for mean scale scores and standard deviations for predictor variables (administrator, colleague, and subordinate support) and

dependent variable subscales (depersonalization, personal accomplishment, and emotional exhaustion) of burnout.

Table 2

*Descriptive Statistics of Means and Standard Deviations of the Variables*

| | *N* | Range | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Standard Deviation | Variance |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| SSWS Admin | 94 | 5.50 | 1.50 | 7.00 | 4.31 | 1.56 | 2.42 |
| SSWS colleague | 94 | 5.88 | 1.00 | 6.88 | 3.59 | 1.48 | 2.18 |
| SSWS subordinate | 94 | 6.00 | 1.00 | 7.00 | 3.68 | 1.60 | 2.55 |
| MBI-ES deperson. | 94 | 5.40 | 0.00 | 5.40 | 1.23 | 1.12 | 1.25 |
| MBI-ES pers.accm. | 94 | 2.50 | 3.50 | 6.00 | 5.01 | 0.58 | 0.33 |
| MBI-ES emotl exh. | 94 | 5.22 | 0.44 | 5.67 | 3.42 | 1.42 | 2.02 |

## Reliability

To assess for internal consistency reliability of the variables in the study, Cronbach's alphas were calculated for the scales used in hypotheses testing. All variables used in the study were found to be acceptable measures of reliability with measures of .70 or higher (Field, 2009) with the exception of the personal accomplishment scale, which had an alpha of .610 in which reliability may be influenced. However, Field (2009) cautions that psychological constructs below .70 are to be expected due to the diversity of sampling measures, size of the sample, the construct being measured and the construction of the measurement scale itself. Table 3 displays Cronbach's alpha for each of the study variables and the total number of items included from the measures for each variable. While personal accomplishment had an alpha of .610 in this study, the MBI-ES is an empirically established instrument that has been used in a multitude of studies with educators since its creation (Maslach et al., 1996).

Table 3

*Cronbach's Alpha Measure of Internal Consistency Reliability of the Study Variables*

| Variable | No. Items | α |
|---|---|---|
| Emotional exhaustion | 9 | 0.933 |
| Depersonalization | 5 | 0.703 |
| Personal accomplishment | 8 | 0.610 |
| Administrator support | 8 | 0.912 |
| Colleague support | 8 | 0.901 |
| Subordinate support | 8 | 0.910 |

## Assumption Testing

MLR analyses were used to test the hypotheses, thus assumptions of MLR were assessed from the data. The assumptions assessed included: Linearity between Predictor and Outcome Variables, Multivariate Normality, Homoscedasticity and Multicollinearity.

### Linearity Between Predictor and Outcome Variables

Figures 1 to 9 show how the assumption of linearity was assessed by examining scatterplots for the study variables which included the means for: administrator support, colleague support, and subordinate support, emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment. The scatterplots below show a moderate linear relationship exists among personal accomplishment with administrator, colleague, and subordinate support. Similarly, a strong linear relationship exists among emotional exhaustion with administrator, colleague, and subordinate support, but only a weak relationship exists among depersonalization with administrator, colleague, and subordinate support. Weaker linearity may be indicative of a weaker correlation among variables.

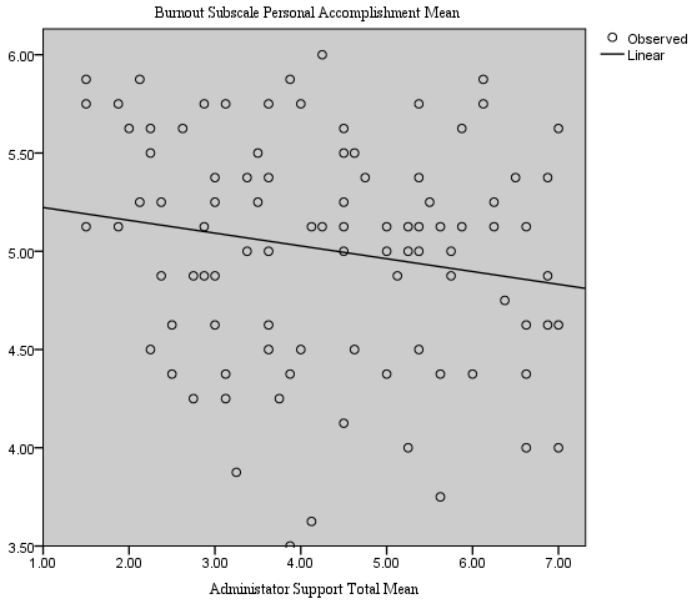


*Figure 1.* Scatterplot assessing linear relationship between personal accomplishment and administrator support means.

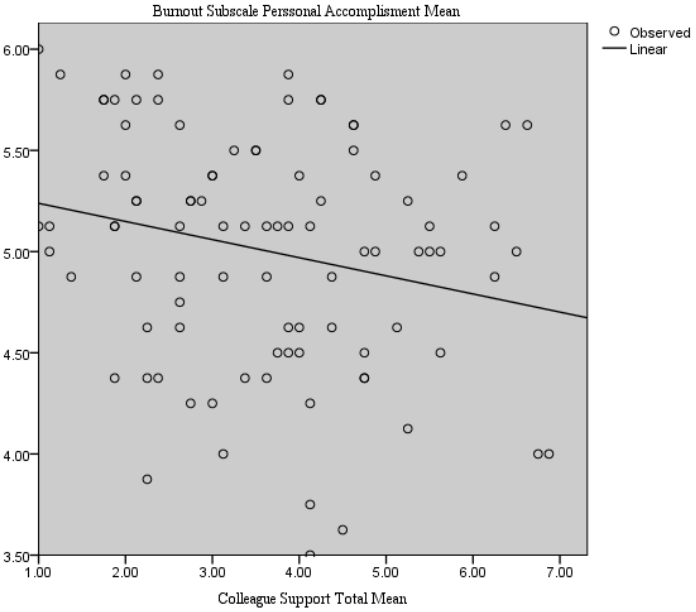


*Figure 2.* Scatterplot assessing linear relationship between personal accomplishment and colleague support means.

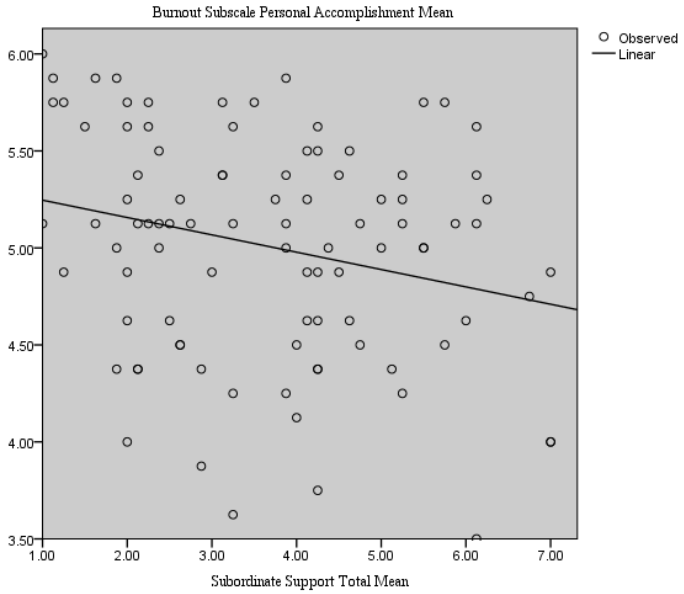


*Figure 3.* Scatterplot assessing linear relationship between personal accomplishment and subordinate support means.

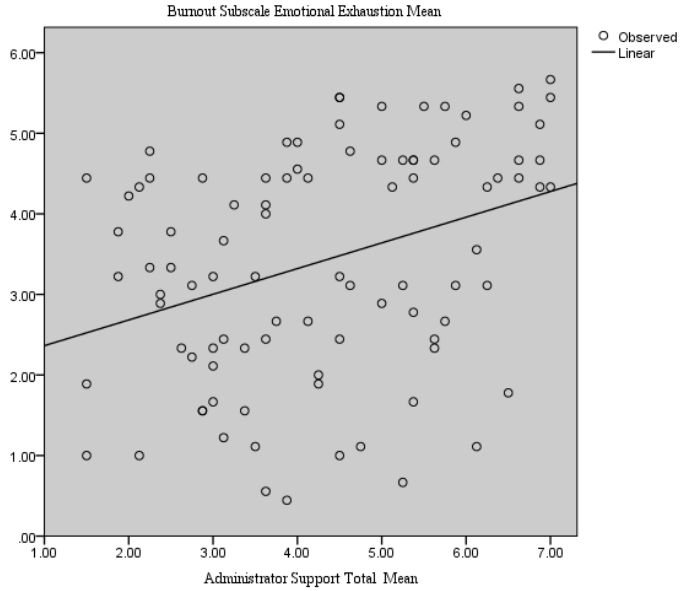


*Figure 4*. Scatterplot assessing linear relationship between emotional exhaustion and administrator support means.

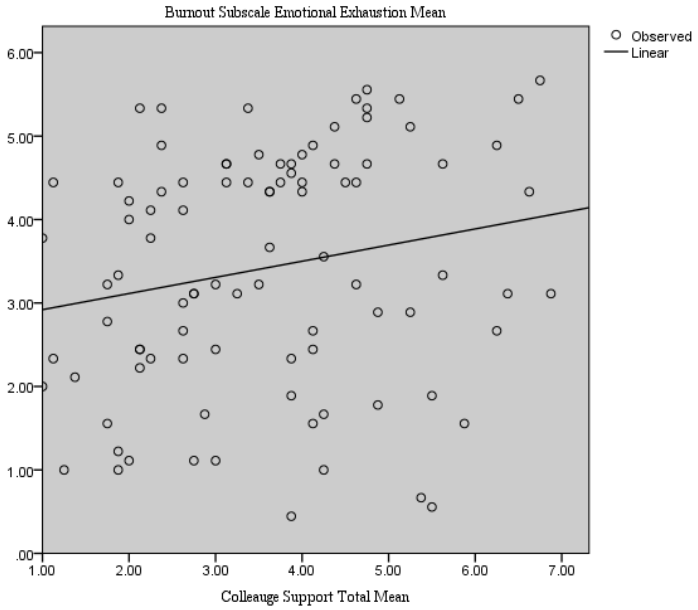


*Figure 5.* Scatterplot assessing linear relationship between emotional exhaustion and colleague support means.

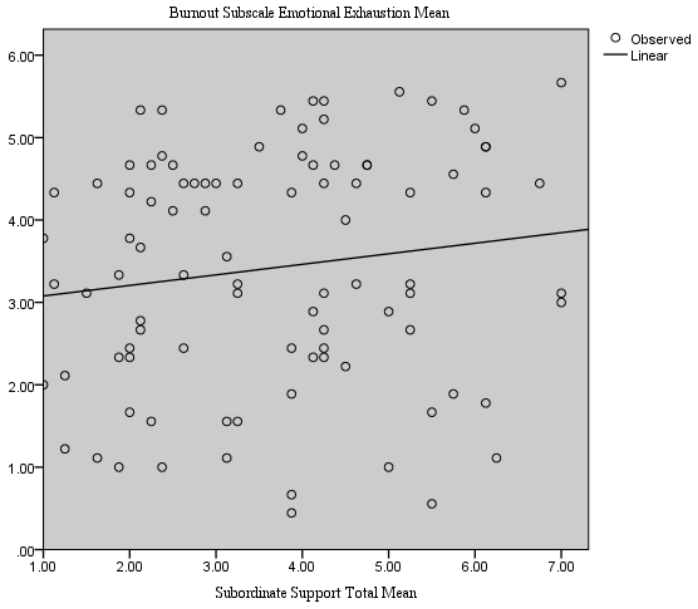


*Figure 6.* Scatterplot assessing linear relationship between emotional exhaustion and subordinate support means.

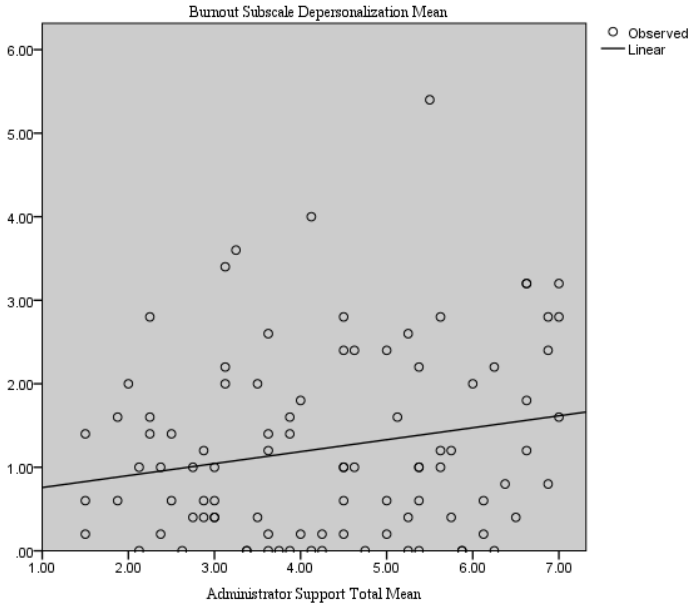


*Figure 7.* Scatterplot assessing linear relationship between depersonalization and administrator support means.

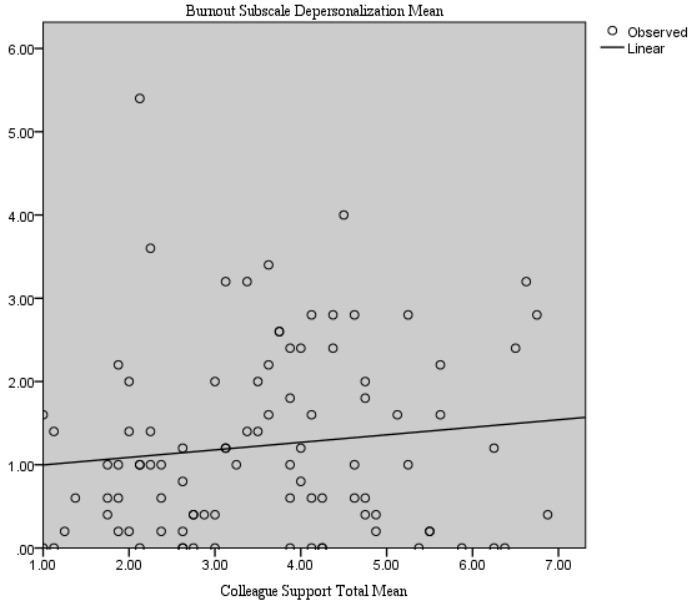


*Figure 8.* Scatterplot assessing linear relationship between depersonalization and colleague support means.

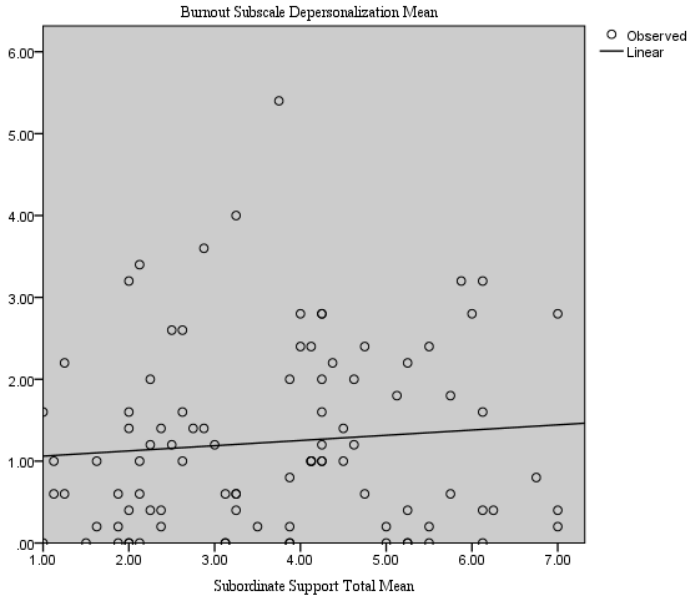


*Figure 9.* Scatterplot assessing linear relationship between depersonalization and subordinate support means.

**Multivariate Normality**

The assumption of multivariate normality for administrator, colleague, and subordinate support were satisfied by visually examining normal Q-Q plots. Figures 10 – 12 represent the normal Q-Q plots for administrative, colleague and subordinate support. The Q-Q plots suggest the assumption of multivariate normality has been met since there is little deviation from expected and observed values along the line, indicating the sample is normally distributed.

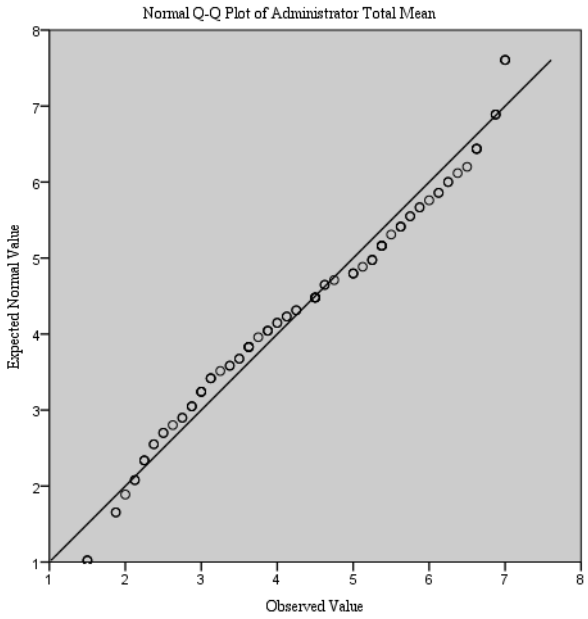


*Figure 10.* Q-Q plot assessing normality of administrator support total means.

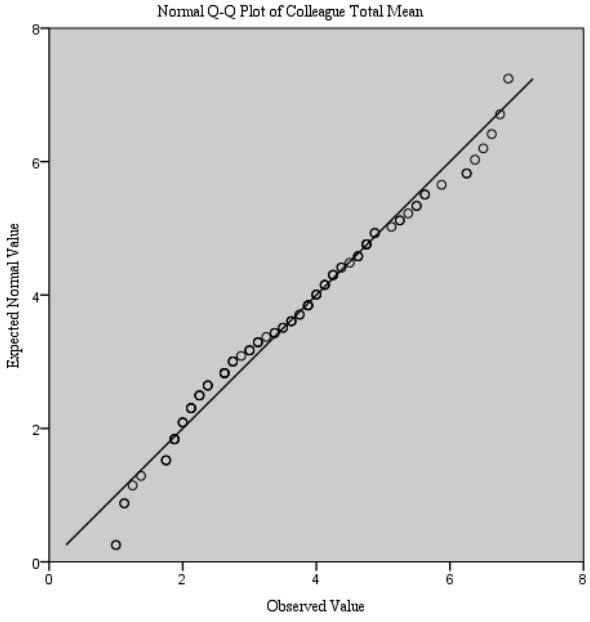


*Figure 11.* Q-Q plot assessing normality of colleague support total means.

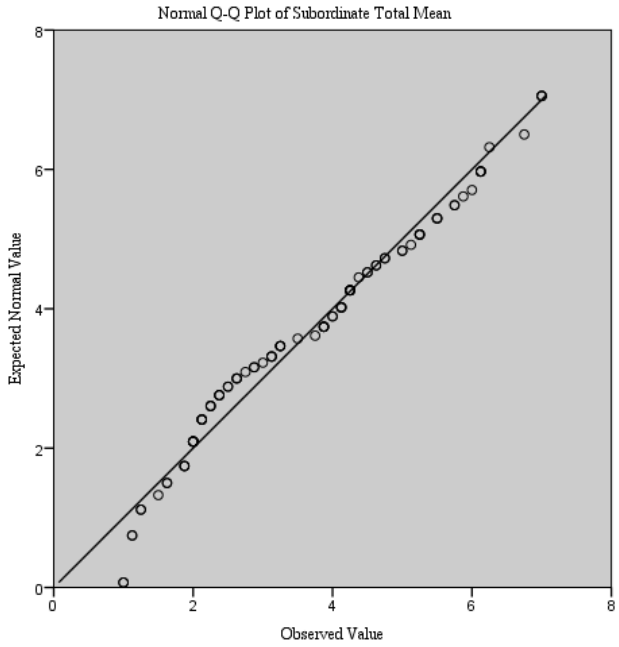


*Figure 12.* Q-Q plot assessing normality of subordinate support total means.

**Homoscedasticity**

The assumption of homoscedasticity was assessed by examining scatterplots of the standardized residuals against standardized predicted values. If the assumption of homoscedasticity was violated, the distribution would form a fan-shaped dispersion among the points (Field, 2009). Scatterplots used to assess homoscedasticity are presented in Figures 13 – 15. Emotional exhaustion and personal accomplishment scatterplots did not form a cone or fan-shaped distribution; therefore the assumption of homoscedasticity is considered met. Depersonalization scatterplot appeared less randomly distributed based on its one outlier, however analyses were run both with, and without the outlier and did not change the results.

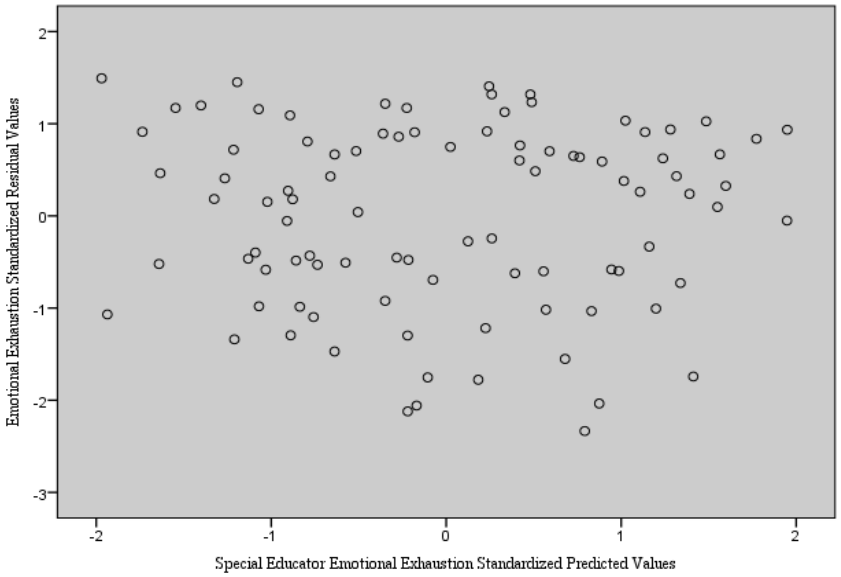


*Figure 13.* Scatterplot of special educator emotional exhaustion standardized residual values against standardized predicted values.

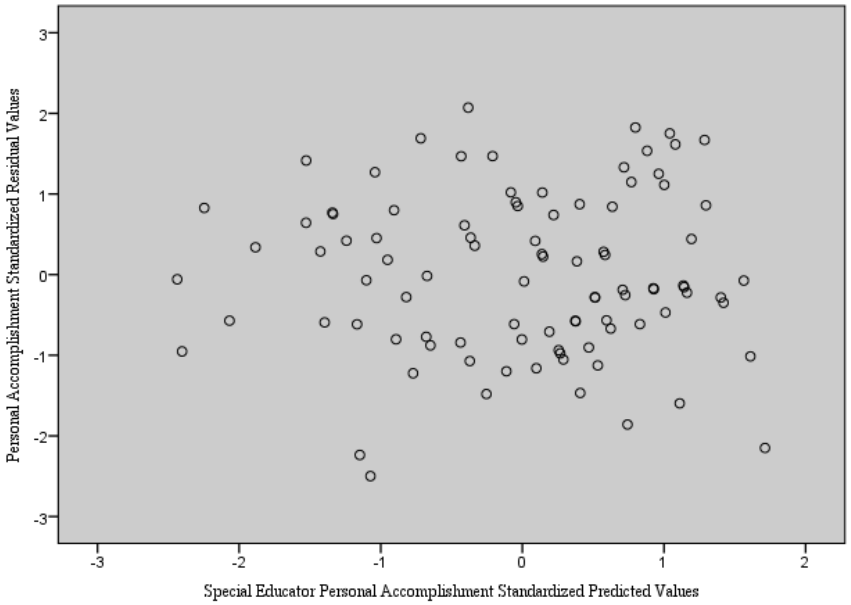


*Figure 14.* Scatterplot of special educator personal accomplishment standardized residual values against standardized predicted values.

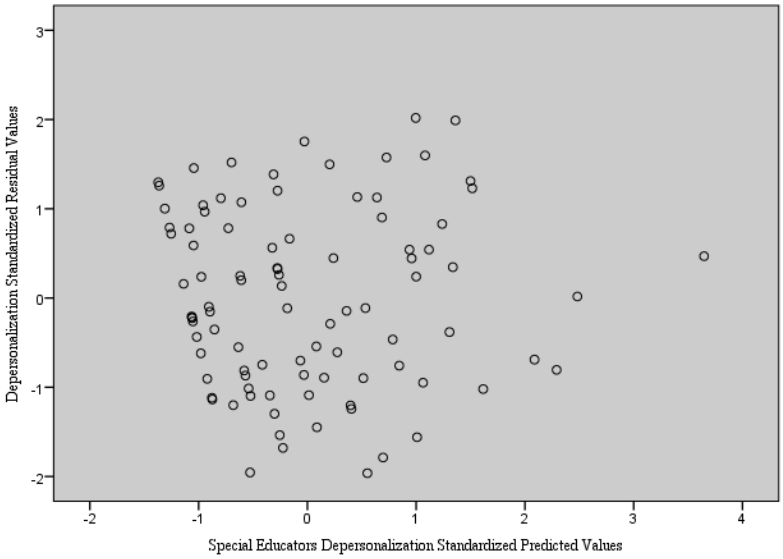


*Figure 15.* Scatterplot of special educator depersonalization standardized residual values against standardized predicted values.

**Multicollinearity**

To identify the presence of multicollinearity among predictor variables in the regression analyses, variance inflation factor (VIF) and tolerance scores were analyzed for the predictor variables within each of the regression analyses. VIF scores of ten or higher suggest that the assumption of multicollinearity was violated, whereas tolerance scores of .1 or less may be cause for concern for multicollinearity among predictors (Field, 2009). Table 4 shows the VIF and tolerance scores for the three predictor variables of social support (administrators, colleagues, and subordinates) for the three regression analyses of the Burnout scales (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and personal accomplishment.) Based on the results of the VIF and tolerance scores, the assumption of multicollinearity has not been violated.

Table 4

*Variance Inflation Factors (VIF) and Tolerance Values for DV Subscales against Predictor Variables*

| | Tolerance | VIF |
|---|---|---|
| Emotional exhaustion | | |
| Administrators | 0.806 | 1.241 |
| Colleagues | 0.643 | 1.556 |
| Subordinates | 0.679 | 1.472 |
| Depersonalization | | |
| Administrators | 0.806 | 1.241 |
| Colleagues | 0.643 | 1.556 |
| Subordinates | 0.679 | 1.472 |
| Personal accomplishment | | |
| Administrators | 0.806 | 1.241 |
| Colleagues | 0.643 | 1.556 |
| Subordinates | 0.679 | 1.472 |

## Results

To address the research questions, three MLR analyses were conducted using the Enter method, to examine whether a relationship exists between three predictor variables of social support (administrators, colleagues, subordinates) against each of the three subscales of burnout (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment). Results of the three regression analyses are below.

### Social Support and Emotional Exhaustion Analysis

MLR was used to analyze three predictor variables of social support: administrator, colleague, and subordinate support against the subscale of emotional exhaustion. Based on the results, the overall regression analysis was significant for emotional exhaustion, $F\,(3, 93) = 4.320$, $p = .00$, $R = .355$, $R^2 = .126$, suggesting that 12.6% of variance in emotional exhaustion could be explained by the three predictor variables. In terms of the unique contribution of each predictor variable, accounting for

all other predictors, only administrator support significantly predicted emotional exhaustion in special educators, $\beta = .323$, $r_{a.bc} = .296$, $p = .00$. See Table 6. The relationship between administrator support and emotional exhaustion was positive indicating that higher social support from administrators is associated with higher emotional exhaustion. Semi-partial correlations for administrators is .290 or 8.4%, indicating that administrators are uniquely associated with 8.4% of the variance in emotional exhaustion after controlling for colleagues and subordinates. Results of the analysis are presented in Table 5.

Table 5

*Multiple Regression Analysis Results of Emotional exhaustion against Predictors of Social Support*

| Model | | Sums of Squares | *df* | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Regression | 23.656 | 3 | 7.885 | 4.320 | 0.007[b] |
| | Residual | 164.266 | 90 | 1.825 | | |
| | Total | 187.923 | 93 | | | |

a. Dep. Variable: Emotional Exhst.

b. Predictors: Admin, Coll, Subord. Means

Table 6

*Unstandardized and Standardized Coefficients of Predictor Variables against Emotional exhaustion*

| | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | | | Correlations | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *B* | *Std. Error* | *Beta* | *t* | *Sig.* | *Zero-Order* | *Partial* | *Part* |
| Constant | 1.932 | 0.473 | | 4.088 | 0.000 | | | |
| Administrator total mean | 0.295 | 0.100 | 0.323 | 2.940 | 0.004 | 0.349 | 0.296 | 0.290 |
| Colleague total mean | 0.070 | 0.118 | 0.073 | 0.592 | 0.555 | 0.201 | 0.062 | 0.058 |
| Subordinate total mean | -0.009 | 0.106 | -0.010 | -0.085 | 0.932 | 0.144 | -0.009 | 0.008 |

a. Constant: Emotional exhaustion

### Social Support and Depersonalization Analysis

A MLR analysis was run to test whether the three predictor variables of social support (administrators, colleagues, and subordinates) could adequately predict the subscale of depersonalization. Results from the regression analysis overall for depersonalization, against the three predictor variables of social support (administrators, colleagues, and subordinates) were not significant. Thus, the null hypothesis was not rejected.

### Social Support Against Personal Accomplishment Analysis

MLR analysis was conducted to analyze three predictors of social support (administrators, colleagues, and subordinates) against the dependent variable of personal accomplishment. Results from the regression analyses as a whole were not significant. Thus, the null hypothesis was not rejected.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the overall regression analysis of the three predictor variables (administrators, colleagues, and subordinates) was statistically significant for emotional exhaustion in the sample of special education teachers. Only administrators predicted emotional exhaustion, indicating that the more socially supported teachers felt by administrators, the more likely they were to report feeling emotionally exhausted. These findings were counterintuitive to what was expected. Practical significance of findings are limited with only 8.4% of the variance in emotional exhaustion being explained by administrator support. Further research may examine factors leading to perceptions of increased emotional exhaustion in educators as a result of administrator support.

Overall analyses on the three predictor variables (administrators, colleagues, subordinates) against each subscale of depersonalization and personal accomplishment were not significant at predicting burnout in the sample of special educators.

## Summary

This quantitative study was conducted to determine whether a statistically significant relationship existed among three predictors of social support (administrators, colleagues, and subordinates) and the three subscales of burnout (depersonalization, emotional exhaustion, and personal accomplishment) using an approved, modified version of the Social Support at Work Scales (SSWS) by Etzion (1984) and the Maslach Burnout Inventory, Educator Survey (MBI-ES) by Maslach & Jackson (1986) to predict for burnout in special education instructors as a function of the level of social support received at work. Results of hypothesis testing led to retaining the null hypotheses with the exception of emotional exhaustion experienced by instructors and their perceptions of social support by administrators. Based on the findings of the regression analyses, social support was not a significant predictor of depersonalization or personal accomplishment for special educators.

In Chapter 5, study results are interpreted as well as methodological limitations from this study and recommendations for future studies on burnout and social support for special educators.

# Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

## Introduction

This quantitative analysis was conducted to examine the influence of social support from administrators, colleagues, and subordinates on burnout (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment) in a sample of special education instructors. According to Langher et al. (2017), special education teacher burnout is a concern within the teaching profession as a result of the physical and emotional demands of working with children with special needs. Previous research has shown that physical demands of the job such as excessive paperwork and/or emotional demands such as social support can increase perceptions of burnout in special education teachers (Brunsting et al., 2014; Griffith et al., 2014; Suh, 2015). Teachers specializing in students with autism or developmental disabilities are at a greater risk of developing burnout due to a lack of perceived social support (Brunsting et al., 2014). Therefore, this current study was designed to expand on existing research by examining whether social support from administrators, colleagues, and subordinates, individually or in linear combination, influenced perceptions of burnout experienced by a sample of special educators working in Southern California.

This exploratory quantitative study anonymously recruited 94 special education teachers using publicly accessible school websites to analyze relationships between burnout and social support from administrators, colleagues, and subordinates in a sample of special educators in Southern California using the 22-item MBI-ES (Maslach & Jackson, 1986) and a modified version of the SSWS (Etzion, 1984). The overall

regression analysis for emotional exhaustion was significant as a predictor of burnout in special educators. Individually, only administrators was positively correlated with emotional exhaustion in special education teachers, suggesting that the more socially supported special educators felt by administrators, the higher their perceived emotional exhaustion. Findings were in the opposite direction of what was expected based on previous research (Brunsting et al., 2014; Furunes, 2015; Suh, 2015). Results were not significant for depersonalization or personal accomplishment as predictors of burnout in the sample of special educators.

In Chapter 5, findings are summarized from Chapter 4, including limitations, recommendations, and implications. I conclude the chapter with recommendations for future studies and implications for positive social change.

## Interpretation of Findings

The interpretation of findings for this study use Bandura's SCT (2001) and the literature review outlined in Chapter 2. Findings are presented here based on the research questions.

### Theoretical Interpretation

The theoretical framework for this study was based on SCT (Bandura, 2001). SCT is appropriate for examining factors of social-structural interconnectedness, such as social support, in predicting burnout in special education instructors (Bandura, 1986, 2001). Current research has contributed to a richer understanding of how social structure and personal agency influence perceptions of burnout in special educators through factors such as self-efficacy, proximity/school climate, and support from administrators in

reducing perceptions of burnout (Bandura, 2001; Boujut et al., 2017; Brunsting et al, 2014; Langher et al., 2017; Suh, 2015; Wang et al., 2015).

**Social Support and Depersonalization**

The first research question asked whether the amount of social support from administrators, colleagues, and subordinates, individually or in a linear combination, predicted depersonalization in special education instructors. Based on data analyses, results were nonsignificant for administrators, colleagues, and subordinates both individually, and in linear combination, as predictor(s) of depersonalization, which differed from existing studies. For example, Langher et al. (2017) found that feelings of depersonalization were negatively correlated with perceived social support, indicating that the more supported special education teachers feel at work, the less likely they are to report feelings related to depersonalization (cynicism, disinterest) with their students. Koenen, Vervoort, and Kelchetermans (2017) found that special education instructors' feelings of depersonalization were positively correlated with student misbehavior, suggesting the more maladaptive behaviors students displayed, the more cynicism and negative thoughts teachers experienced.

**Social Support and Emotional Exhaustion**

The second research question asked whether social support from administrators, colleagues, and subordinates, individually or in a linear combination, predicted emotional exhaustion in special education instructors. The overall data analysis was significant for emotional exhaustion, which accounted for 12.6% of variance explained by the three predictor variables (administrators, colleagues, and subordinates). Individually, only

administrator support was significant in predicting emotional exhaustion in special educators. Individually, administrators accounted for 8.4% of the variance explained in emotional exhaustion experienced by special educators, while controlling for both colleagues and subordinates. There was a positive correlation between support from administrators and perceptions of emotional exhaustion, meaning that the more supported the sample of special education instructors felt by their administrators, the more emotional exhaustion was perceived. The results of this study were in contrast to previous research, which has shown reduced perceptions of emotional exhaustion in special educators as a function of administrator support received (Brunsting et al., 2014; Fiorilli et al., 2017; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2016; Vittek, 2015). However, existing studies on managerial style(s) may account for these unexpected findings. For example, Gkorezis, Pedridou, and Krouklidou (2015) reported positive correlations between emotional exhaustion and administrator support when a laissez-faire or Machiavellian leadership style was implemented with teachers rather than a more collaborative approach. Results from these previous studies may provide justification for this study's counterintuitive findings. Additionally, there may be issues on the validity of the scales with this sample, which are discussed in the Limitations section.

**Social Support and Personal Accomplishment**

The final research question asked whether the amount of social support from administrators, colleagues, and subordinates, individually or in a linear combination, predicted personal accomplishment in special education instructors. Based on data analyses, results were nonsignificant for administrators, colleagues, and subordinates

both individually, and in linear combination, as predictor(s) of personal accomplishment. These results were in contrast with other studies that have shown an association between social supports, feelings of personal accomplishment, and reduced perceptions of burnout. For example, Boujut et al. (2016) found that overall satisfaction with the level of support received from administrators accounted for higher feelings of personal accomplishment in special educators. Similarly, Brunsting et al. (2014) and Langher et al. (2017) found that the quality of support is more influential for special educators than the quantity of support in reducing perceptions of burnout and increasing feelings of accomplishment. Similarly, Griffith et al. (2014) and Furunes et al. (2015) argued the importance of incorporating managerial styles that promote autonomy and higher levels of administrator support to increase perceptions of personal accomplishment.

In summary, one of three hypotheses was supported in the results of this study. Results indicated a positive linear relationship between social support from administrators and perceived emotional exhaustion. Special educators' feelings of depersonalization and personal accomplishment were not predicted by social support from administrators, colleagues, or subordinates. Likewise, emotional exhaustion was not related to social support from colleagues or subordinates. However, as discussed above, I did not conduct an exhaustive examination of all potential factors which may be influencing social-structural interconnectedness regarding special educators or their experiences of burnout. In addition, as discussed above, the quality of social support rather than the quantity may be an important factor.

## Limitations of the Study

There were several limitations that influenced this study, including the use of nonrandom sampling measures, the use of self-report measures, the use of a reversed Likert scale in the modified SSWS based on Israeli standards (reversed order), which may have confused participants, and that the modified scale may not have not been a valid measure of social support as written.

For example, in this study, I used nonrandom stratified sampling measures to recruit special education instructors from eight counties within Southern California who teach in autism-specific classrooms. Narrow sampling parameters may limit the generalizability of findings to special educators in other locations. Additionally, the sample consisted mostly of those identifying as White females, which differed from the population parameters and may further limit generalizability of findings. Similarly, I used surveymonkey.com as an online platform for participants to respond to the invitation. While responses were anonymous, participants may have responded in a socially appropriate way to some questions regarding more sensitive subjects such as depersonalization or feeling supported by administrators and colleagues out of fear of judgement or risk of losing their job. Similarly, an unknown confounding variable may have influenced results since only teachers from Southern California who teach in autism-specific classrooms at the K to 6 grade level were recruited. A personality trait, managerial style, or other skill set that is specific to this population may have influenced their responses unbeknownst to me. Lastly, the survey was created in surveymonkey.com using the same standards as the original SSWS that was created in Israel. The SSWS

questionnaire was originally created, written, and administered in Hebrew and translated into English. This translation from Hebrew may have influenced how the questions were interpreted or answered by participants. Similarly, the SSWS scale was modified from its original version to include three response options: administrators, colleagues, and subordinates. Some participants may have been confused on how to respond to a question such as, "To what extent are you able to take time off when you are under pressure?" if their school or district policy does not take colleagues or subordinates into consideration when scheduling time off for teachers. The Likert scale on the modified SSWS used the same 7-point rating scale format as the original version for consistency. Scores began with seven as the highest score, and ended with one as the lowest score (7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1), which may have confused participants, who may have been more accustomed to responding with questionnaires beginning with a one as the lowest score and ending with seven as the high score (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7). The SSWS scale was in reverse order of how the burnout scale was measured. To account for the reverse order in the original SSWS, I added instructions at the beginning of each of the eight questions in the modified SSWS to reflect the following idea: "There are no "right" or "wrong" answers to the questions. Questions are weighted on a 7-point scale, with 7 = *very much* and 1 = *very little*".

## Recommendations

Recommendations for further research could include obtaining a larger random sample of special education instructors throughout all of California to support more robust generalizability. Similarly, using a mixed methods approach in further research to include both personal interviews from teachers regarding their experiences in teaching in

autism-specific classes and standardized self-report questionnaires may offer more insight into the level of support special educators feel in helping reduce perceptions of burnout. Future studies could employ a qualitative approach to explore the unique experiences of special educators on their perceptions of burnout. Additionally, research may further examine administrative/managerial styles and influences of burnout experienced by special educators. Lastly, comparisons studies could include both special education instructors and general education instructors to analyze similarities and differences between social support received and perceptions of burnout experienced between the two types of educators.

## Implications for Social Change

Methodological issues may have influenced the counterintuitive results making specific social implications difficult to discuss. Generally speaking, positive social change can occur when there are benefits to individuals and society at large. Prosocial changes may help promote positive transformations on an individual, professional, and global level for special educators. For example, on an individual level, special education instructors could establish a daily routine that allows them time for themselves, such as a yoga/stretch break to decompress while their class is at recess or lunch, which may reduce feelings of stress. On a professional level, seasoned instructors could donate their time to newer instructors to provide mentorship, advice, suggestions and feedback, which may help foster perceptions of social support at both the colleague and subordinate levels. Similarly, positive social change can occur at the systems level by strengthening bonds among administrators, colleagues, and subordinates throughout schools and school

districts. Administrators can create programs that foster mentorship, emotional support, and increased motivation for special educators. This in turn may reduce perceptions of burnout experienced by teachers and helping to promote a sense of self-worth and accomplishment on the job. Schools and districts that support a collaborative working environment that foster teamwork and camaraderie among staff may help promote more positive working conditions, which may benefit both teachers and administration. Program success can be assessed and modified to track teacher support, perceptions of burnout, and positive changes implemented within the school climate. Schools and districts nationwide that have incepted such programs have shown positive results for supporting teachers to reduce attrition and burnout (Paulsen, DaFonte & Barton-Arwood, 2015; Rooks-Ellis, 2017). On a global level, teachers who experience less burnout may be more likely to provide higher quality education to their students, which in turn can promote higher self-efficacy and self-empowerment for students and families living with special-needs.

## Conclusion

This quantitative analysis was conducted to analyze whether there was a statistically significant relationship between social support from administrators, colleagues, and subordinates and the constructs of burnout (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment). The use of this study's predictor variables were considered based on findings from existing research that support correlations among factors of social support and social-structural interconnectedness as predictors of burnout in special educators (Boujut et al., 2016; Brunsting et al., 2014;

Suh, 2015). This study was conducted with the assumption that there would be significant findings between the three predictors of social support against the three subscales of burnout. Findings from this study indicate a significant positive correlation between support from administrators and an increase in experiences of emotional exhaustion; the reverse of what was expected. Findings were not significant for depersonalization and personal accomplishment. Descriptive analyses showed special educators felt a moderate level of support from their administrators, colleagues, and subordinates, with the most support as coming from administrators, with emotional exhaustion being reported most frequently by participants. It is my hope that further research and analyses can help promote positive programs for special education instructors geared at helping reduce experiences of burnout. With continued support from administrators, colleagues, and subordinates, it is possible for special education instructors to continue providing essential skills that promote a child's independence and adaptive functioning.

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Appendix A: Maslach Burnout Inventory – Educators Survey



**MBI-Educators Survey**

| **How often:** | **0** | **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** | **5** | **6** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Never | A few times a year or less | Once a month or less | A few times a month | Once a week | A few times a week | Every day |

**How Often**

| | **0-6** | **Statements:** |
|---|---|---|
| 1. | _____ | I feel emotionally drained from my work. |
| 2. | _____ | I feel used up at the end of the workday. |
| 3. | _____ | I feel fatigued when I get up in the morning and have to face another day on the job. |
| 4. | _____ | I can easily understand how my students feel about things. |
| 5. | _____ | I feel I treat some students as if they were impersonal objects. |
| 6. | _____ | Working with people all day is really a strain for me. |
| 7. | _____ | I deal very effectively with the problems of my students. |
| 8. | _____ | I feel burned out from my work. |
| 9. | _____ | I feel I'm positively influencing other people's lives through my work. |
| 10. | _____ | I've become more callous toward people since I took this job. |
| 11. | _____ | I worry that this job is hardening me emotionally. |
| 12. | _____ | I feel very energetic. |
| 13. | _____ | I feel frustrated by my job. |
| 14. | _____ | I feel I'm working too hard on my job. |

15. _____ I don't really care what happens to some students.

16. _____ Working with people directly puts too much stress on me.

17. _____ I can easily create a relaxed atmosphere with my students.

18. _____ I feel exhilarated after working closely with my students.

19. _____ I have accomplished many worthwhile things in this job.

20. _____ I feel like I'm at the end of my rope.

21. _____ In my work, I deal with emotional problems very calmly.

22. _____ I feel students blame me for some of their problems.

(Administrative use only)

**EE:** _____cat:_____**DP:** _____ cat:_____**PA:** _____ cat:_____

Appendix B: Social Support at Work Scales (Modified)

In the following pages you will be asked a series of questions on the nature of your work, the pressures to which you are exposed, and your views in general. There are no "right" or "wrong" answers to the questions.

## Work and Life Characteristics *[Social Support items]*

The following questions deal with the nature of your work. Please circle the number that most accurately describes your work for each response option of "administrators, colleagues, and subordinates."

| | | Very much | | | Moderately | | | Very little |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | To what extent do you receive feedback on your performance? (That is, how much information do you receive on the level of your success and performance?) | | | | | | | |
| | a) Administrators | **7** | **6** | **5** | **4** | **3** | **2** | **1** |
| | b) Colleagues | **7** | **6** | **5** | **4** | **3** | **2** | **1** |
| | c) Subordinates | **7** | **6** | **5** | **4** | **3** | **2** | **1** |
| 2. | To what extent do you get appreciation and recognition for what you do? | | | | | | | |
| | a) Administrators | **7** | **6** | **5** | **4** | **3** | **2** | **1** |
| | b) Colleagues | **7** | **6** | **5** | **4** | **3** | **2** | **1** |
| | c) Subordinates | **7** | **6** | **5** | **4** | **3** | **2** | **1** |
| 3. | To what extent are you able to share the burden with others in terms of your duties, responsibilities and obligations? | | | | | | | |
| | a) Administrators | **7** | **6** | **5** | **4** | **3** | **2** | **1** |
| | b) Colleagues | **7** | **6** | **5** | **4** | **3** | **2** | **1** |

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| c) Subordinates | **7** | **6** | **5** | **4** | **3** | **2** | **1** |

4. To what extent are you able to take time off when you are under pressure?

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| a) Administrators | **7** | **6** | **5** | **4** | **3** | **2** | **1** |
| b) Colleagues | **7** | **6** | **5** | **4** | **3** | **2** | **1** |
| c) Subordinates | **7** | **6** | **5** | **4** | **3** | **2** | **1** |

5. To what extent is support and advice available to you when you are experiencing difficulties?

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| a) Administrators | **7** | **6** | **5** | **4** | **3** | **2** | **1** |
| b) Colleagues | **7** | **6** | **5** | **4** | **3** | **2** | **1** |
| c) Subordinates | **7** | **6** | **5** | **4** | **3** | **2** | **1** |

6. To what extent do you feel emotional reciprocity from others?

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| a) Administrators | **7** | **6** | **5** | **4** | **3** | **2** | **1** |
| b) Colleagues | **7** | **6** | **5** | **4** | **3** | **2** | **1** |
| c) Subordinates | **7** | **6** | **5** | **4** | **3** | **2** | **1** |

7. To what extent is the quality of your relationships with others satisfactory?

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| a) Administrators | **7** | **6** | **5** | **4** | **3** | **2** | **1** |

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| b) Colleagues | **7** | **6** | **5** | **4** | **3** | **2** | **1** |
| c) Subordinates | **7** | **6** | **5** | **4** | **3** | **2** | **1** |

8. To what degree are you satisfied with your <u>personal relationships at work</u> with the following people:

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| a) Administrators | **7** | **6** | **5** | **4** | **3** | **2** | **1** |
| b) Colleagues | **7** | **6** | **5** | **4** | **3** | **2** | **1** |
| c) Subordinates | **7** | **6** | **5** | **4** | **3** | **2** | **1** |

**THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION**

# Appendix C: Demographics Questionnaire

The following questions concern your role as a special education instructor within the state of California, and your unique demographic information including total years teaching in special education, your age group and ethnicity. The information gathered from this questionnaire is for descriptive statistical purposes only and your information will NOT be shared, sold or disclosed to colleagues, supervisors, subordinates, or your school district. The information obtained from this questionnaire is used to gather statistical demographics on a group of participants as a whole. Your privacy is valued and all necessary measures have been taken to ensure your information remains secure. Your answers will be kept strictly confidential and will not be used to identify you personally, or your participation in this study. You reserve the right to refuse to respond should you become uncomfortable.

1. How many years of teaching in a special education environment do you have?
   _____ years

2. How many children do you currently have in your class with an Autism diagnosis? _____

3. Your age group:

   [___] 18 – 24
   [___] 25 – 34
   [___] 35 – 44
   [___] 45 – 54
   [___] 55 – 64
   [___] 65+

4. The gender in which you identify:

   [___] Male
   [___] Female
   [___] Other

5. The ethnicity in which you identify:
   [___] White
   [___] African American
   [___] Asian
   [___] Hispanic

[___] Other *(please specify)* _____

6. County in which you teach:
   - [___] Santa Barbara
   - [___] Ventura
   - [___] Los Angeles
   - [___] Orange
   - [___] Riverside
   - [___] San Bernardino
   - [___] San Diego
   - [___] Imperial

***Thank you for your support and participation.***

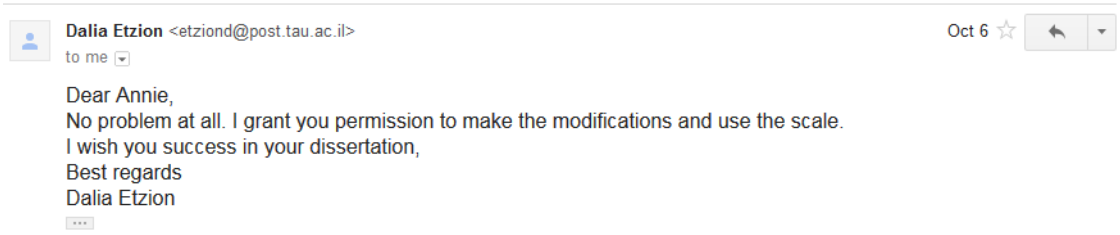
## Appendix D: Permission to Use Modified Social Support at Work Scales

## (SSWS)

Hello Dr. Etzion,
My name is Annie Tanasugarn and I am a PhD candidate at Walden University and am completing my dissertation under the supervision of my Dissertation Chair, Dr. Patricia Loun. We had previously spoken in late 2015 regarding my interest in using your Social Support at Work Scale (SSWS) in which you offered me guidance on modifying your existing scale to reflect all response options as similar to your #8 response, "supervisors, coworkers, subordinates". Your advice to sum the mean scores or aggregate them is very helpful as I approach completion of my proposal for approval, and IRB review in order to gather my sample.
My dissertation is titled, "Predictors of Burnout among California Special Education Teachers". I am proposing to recruit a sample of special education instructors in California to complete the modified SSWS survey and the Maslach Burnout Inventory Educators Survey (MBI-ES) to predict what level, or type, of social support (Administrators, peers, subordinates) is most predictive of burnout in my sample. Information gleaned from this proposed study can help create high quality standardized programs for instructors designed to offer mentoring, support and guidance for special education instructors deemed at risk for developing burnout.

I am attaching a copy of both the original scale and the modifications I propose for my study. Please look them over, and if you accept my proposed modifications to your SSWS, please grant me permission to use it.
Please feel free to contact me, should you have any questions or concerns.
Thank you for your time and consideration,
Annie Tanasugarn, M.S., BCBA
PhD Candidate; Psychology
Walden University

# Appendix E: Approval to Use Modified Social Support at Work Scales (SSWS)

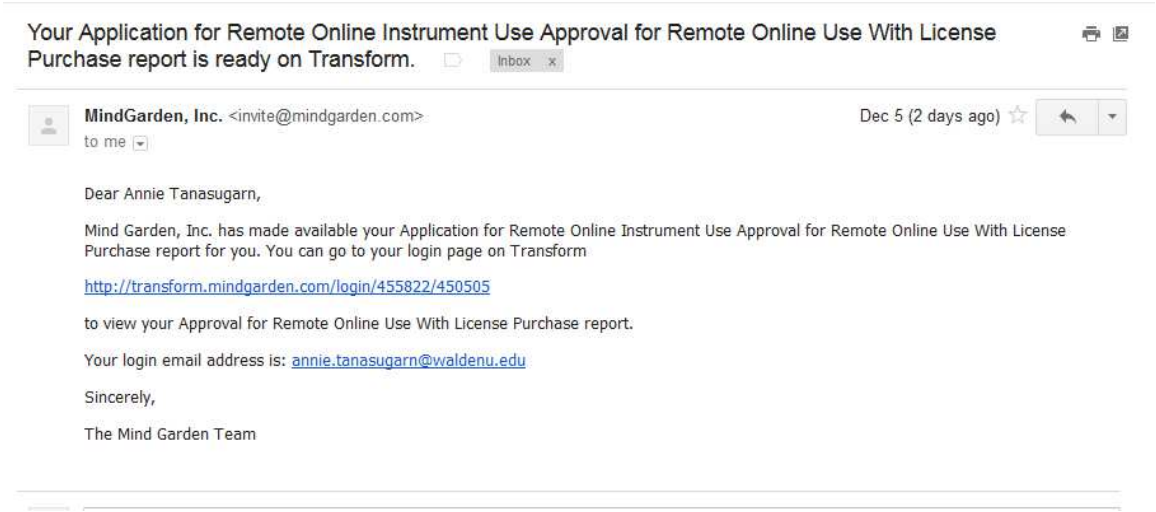


**Dalia Etzion** <etziond@post.tau.ac.il> Oct 6

to me

Dear Annie,
No problem at all. I grant you permission to make the modifications and use the scale.
I wish you success in your dissertation,
Best regards
Dalia Etzion

Appendix F: Approval to Use Maslach Burnout Inventory Educators Edition (MBI-ES)



Your Application for Remote Online Instrument Use Approval for Remote Online Use With License Purchase report is ready on Transform. Inbox ×

**MindGarden, Inc.** <invite@mindgarden.com> Dec 5 (2 days ago)

to me

Dear Annie Tanasugarn,

Mind Garden, Inc. has made available your Application for Remote Online Instrument Use Approval for Remote Online Use With License Purchase report for you. You can go to your login page on Transform

http://transform.mindgarden.com/login/455822/450505

to view your Approval for Remote Online Use With License Purchase report.

Your login email address is: annie.tanasugarn@waldenu.edu

Sincerely,

The Mind Garden Team