CHAPTER II

THE BURNOUT SYNDROME
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This Chapter attempts to discuss the concept of burnout. Various definitions given by researchers are presented in this chapter with a view to synthesising them and to arriving at the conceptual frame of this study.

As already stated, the current research interest in burnout is of fairly recent origin. Although the term burnout was not occurring in psychological literature prior to the late 1970s, it has suddenly gained currency in the recent years.

The term burnout has been used in literature in many different ways (Cherniss, 1980a). No single definition of burnout is accepted as the standard one (Maslach, 1982). It is also argued that "over usage and over extension tend to make the term meaningless" (Freudenberger, 1983, p.24).

The term burnout coined by Freudenberger (1974) connotes a response to chronic job related stress in the human services. The dictionary defines burnout as 'to wearout, or become exhausted by making excessive demands on energy' (Woolf, 1981, p.147). Burnout is a stress syndrome and is complex (Sweeney, 1981).

Detached concern (Lief & Fox, 1963) and dehumanization in self defence (Zimbardo, 1970) are the two concepts found in the literature relevant to burnout syndrome. Detached concern refers to avoiding over involvement with others and dehumanization in self-defence refers to treating the persons as mere objects.
Burnout is also defined as "the attitude that a job is a job is a job" (Edelwich & Brodsky, 1980, p.14). Accordingly, unlimited commitments & overidentification with others contribute burnout.

Cherniss (1980a) defines burnout as changes in motivation. 'Burnout is defined as psychological withdrawal from work in response to excessive stress or dissatisfaction' (p.16). Burnout is a process consisting of stress, strain and defensive coping. Stress arises due to an imbalance between resources and demands. Strain is characterized by feelings of anxiety, tension, fatigue and exhaustion. In defensive coping a number of changes in attitude and behaviour takes place which includes emotional detachment, withdrawal, cynicism and rigidity. Burnout is not necessarily considered to be total or permanent. It is also not necessary that job stress may lead to strain. Even if the individual experiences strain, the defensive coping may not be possible. Even if strain leads to defensive coping, the behavioural changes occurring in the individual may be mild or temporary.

Berkeley Planning Associates (1977) refer to burnout as synonymous with alienation.

Burnout is further defined as 'Physical and emotional exhaustion resulting in discernible negative responses and attitudes towards both others and oneself'(Lachman, 1983, p.5).

The burnout, in its initial period may be associated with negative attitude towards one's job. Later period may be associated with negative attitude towards one's own self. Finally, the burnedout individual is also said to develop a loss of feeling and concern for others.

As pointed out by Maslach (1982), even though the term burnout is defined in the literature in different ways, some similarities are found among them.

'First of all, there is a general agreement that burnout occurs at an individual level. Second, there is general agreement that burnout is an internal psychological experience involving feelings, attitudes, motives and expectations. Third, there is a general agreement that burnout is a negative experience for the individual, in that it concerns problems, distress, discomfort, dysfunction, and/or negative consequences' (Maslach, 1982, p.31-32).

Burnout is not a dichotomous variable. It is conceptualized as a continuous variable ranging from low to high degrees of experienced burnout (Cherniss, 1981a). Burnout syndrome is multidimensional one (Maslach & Jackson, 1981b, Lachman, 1983).

Increased feeling of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced feeling of personal accomplishment are the key dimensions of burnout (Maslach & Jackson, 1981b). Emotional exhaustion refers to emotionally drained due to contact with other people. Depersonalization refers to an unfeeling and callous response to their recipients. Reduced
personal accomplishment refers to a decline in workers' feeling of competence and successful achievement in their work with other individuals.

Burnout is regarded as a process (Edelwich & Brodsky, 1980; Cherniss, 1980a; Veninga & Spradley, 1981; Maslach & Jackson 1981b; Freudenberger, 1984). Maslach & Jackson (1981b) suggest that burnout is a developmental phenomenon. Golembiewski et al (1983) in their research conclude that the least, more and most important contributors to burnout are depersonalization, lack of personal accomplishment and emotional exhaustion respectively.

Job burnout passes through distinct stages. Each stage will be more serious than the previous stage. However, there are individual differences in experiencing these stages of burnout. The first stage is the honeymoon stage in which the individual feels the existence of high energy and job satisfaction. In this stage the individual expends valuable energy and if the individual is unable to fill completely the energy, s/he will move to the second stage of burnout cycle, the fuel shortage stage. In fuel shortage stage the individual begins to feel job dissatisfaction, inefficiency at work, general fatigue, sleep disturbances and indulge in escape activities. Inefficiency at work is expressed in terms of jadedness, cynicism, lowered creativity, avoiding decisions and increased accidents. If the individual fails to recognize these early warning signals and attend to them, s/he will slip into the next stage of the burnout cycle, the chronic symptoms stage. In this stage the individual begins to feel that something is happening to him / her. In this stage the individual feels chronic exhaustion, physical illness, anger
and depression. If the individual fails to attack the problem and to develop new safety valve, s/he will move to the next stage, the crisis stage. In crisis stage the symptoms appeared in the early stages will become critical. The individual will become obsessed with his / her problem. S/he will become pessimistic and the individual wants to escape from his / her environment and feels like a trapped animal. In this stage burnout dominates the individual's life. Some people enter into the fifth stage, hitting-the-wall stage. In this stage the individual experiences burnout at the maximum extent and because of that s/he will lose control over his / her career and life (Veninga & Spradley, 1981).

Burnout is not developed as a result of any single factor. The personality, the stress experienced by the individuals in their work environment, perception and response to stress by the individuals, the needs and the social values are the contributing factors to burnout (Freudenberger, 1982, 1984).

Feeling of progressive deterioration and exhaustion coming as a consequence of depletion of energy are accompanied in burnout process. Burnout occurs if the individuals have to face excessive demand than the available energy, strength and resources and may result in loss of motivation (Freudenberger, 1984).

Stress and burnout are not synonymous, rather, excessive and prolonged levels of job stress produce strain and result in burnout on the part of the individual if the coping mechanism adopted by the individual is improper (Cherniss, 1980b, Whitehead, 1987). Shinn et al (1984) conceptualise 'burnout as a psychological strain resulting from the stress of human service work' (p.864).

Depression and burnout are not synonymous. (Freudenberger, 1980). However 'burnout and moderate forms of depression are quite difficult to differentiate on a symptom level'. (Freudenberger, 1982, p.177).

Temporary fatigue or strain is different from burnout. Socialization is also not the same as burnout. Temporary fatigue or strain may be the earlier sign of burnout. In socialization the individual's attitude and behaviour are changed in response to social influence of others. In burnout the changes in attitude and behaviour of the individuals occur in response to overload and stress caused by their job (Cherniss, 1980a).

Burnout people lose interest in their job and develop intentions to leave their job (Maslach & Jackson, 1979; Jones, 1980; Kafry, 1981) It is also reported in research studies that burnout may lead to turnover among people in human service (Freudenberger, 1975; Maslach, 1976; 1978b; Pines et al, 1981). However, Cherniss (1980a) suggests that 'burnout should be distinguished from turnover (p.21)'. According to him burnout and turnover are different, however high turnover may be a sign of high burnout among workers.
Summary

Burnout is a syndrome and is described as a response to chronic job related stress. It is a process and occurs when excessive demands are made on available energies. Burnout is a multi-dimensional phenomenon and is unique to the helping professionals because of their intense involvement with other people.