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Does Burnout Help Predict Depression? a Longitudinal Investigation

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Introduction. Whether burnout is anything other than a (job-related) depressive syndrome is unclear. A growing body of research suggests that the overlap of burnout with depression has been largely underestimated.

Objectives. The aim of this longitudinal study was to examine whether burnout at baseline helped predict depression at follow-up when depression at baseline was controlled for.

Methods. A total of 627 French teachers took part in the two waves of this study, launched in 2012. About three of four participants were female and mean age at time 1 (T1) was 41. Depression was assessed with the 9-item depression module of the Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9). Using the PHQ-9, the severity of depressive symptoms can be graded and provisional diagnoses of major depressive disorders can be established. Burnout was measured with the Maslach Burnout Inventory. Participants completed the follow-up on an average 21 months after completing the initial survey.

Results. Hierarchical multiple regression analysis showed that a model involving T1 burnout and depression as predictors did not explain more variance in depression at follow-up than a model involving T1 depression as the only predictor. Binary logistic regression analyses indicated that T1 burnout no longer predicted cases of major depression at follow-up when T1 depression was included in the tested model. All these results were obtained controlling for gender, age, and length of employment.

Conclusions. This study confirms that burnout overlaps with depression. Assessing burnout in addition to depression may not be as useful as assumed in the past.