

## **Worklife Balance among Part-Time MBA Students of the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology School of Business In Ghana**

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### **Abstract**

**Background:** *Several institutions in Ghana now offer part-time Masters Programmes in Business Administration for working professionals.*

**Aim:** *To examine demographic and other characteristics that may be associated with increased burnout among working part-time MBA students in Ghana.*

**Methods:** *500 part-time MBA students of the Business School at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology in Ghana were approached and asked to complete the Areas of Worklife Survey.*

**Results:** *Of the 500 students approached and provided with information about the survey, 423 completed and returned the survey forms giving a response rate of 84.6%. Female students achieved significantly higher scores than male students with regards their perception about how unmanageability the quantum of the workload at their work place is while male students achieved significantly higher scores than female students when it came to their perception about fairness at the workplace. Also, while part-time workers tend to express significant disagreement about how unmanageability the quantum of their workload is, full-time workers are significantly more likely to perceive their work place as offering reward for performance.*

**Conclusions:** *Part-time MBA students in Ghana experience burnout at work which is influenced by multiple inter-related factors.*

**Key words:** Burnout, students, part-time, community, control, fairness, values, workload

### **1.0 Introduction**

Continuing professional development has become popular among workers in Ghana, with many pursuing professional and management courses in higher educational institutions through part-time or distance learning programmes. Several institutions in Ghana now offer part-time Masters Programmes in Business Administration (MBA) which are usually over-subscribed despite their high financial cost and the potential for adding to the burnout among the working students. Burnout has been described as a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and diminished personal accomplishment that occur among people-helping professions (Firth, McIntee, McKeown, & Britton, 1985). It is seen as a persistent dysfunctional state that results from prolonged exposure to chronic stress; that is a situation where a person feels confronted incessantly to a high level of demands and insufficient resources linked to the work itself and to the context in which the work takes place (Cooper, 1999; Jourdain & Chênevert, 2010; Leiter & Maslach, 1999). Demands refers to the physical, psychological, social and organizational aspects of the job that require an effort by the employee whereas resources refer to the same aspects as demands, but are intended to facilitate the attainment of work goals, to stimulate personal growth or to reduce job demands (Bakker, Van Emmerik, & Van Riet, 2008).

Various theoretical approaches to burnout have been proposed, ranging from individual to societal (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2007). Burnout has also been described as a negative state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion that is accompanied by a deep sense of failure from work (Yang & Farn, 2005). These definitions ignore the potential for burnout among students and more recent studies have focused on this. In a web-based survey to compare levels of study stress, burnout, alcohol habits and depression among medical and business students, it was noted that business students scored higher on several study stress factors and on disengagement from their studies (Dahlin, Nilsson, Stotzer, & Runeson, 2011). Working full-time and simultaneously pursuing a part-time study could be particularly daunting for many individuals some of whom may experience significant burnout, leading to underperformance both at work and with their studies.

For some individuals, this may create role conflict, which is another important organizational factor that influences psychosocial work climate and generates job-related stress (Kalliath & Morris, 2002). Lack of congruent expectations and demands from other people in the workplace are psychologically uncomfortable and may compound stress related to studies as well as induce negative emotional reactions, diminish effectiveness and job satisfaction, and decrease the employee's intent to remain a member of the organization (Allen & Mellor, 2002; Burke, 2002). Different students exhibit different levels of burnout depending on the nature of their jobs and the role they play at their work place. In an Australian study of conflict between paid work and study, property and construction students were found to have very high levels of burnout compared to professional samples (Lingard, 2007). Part-time MBA students in Ghana come from diverse professional and managerial backgrounds, and to date, to our knowledge, no study has examined burnout among these students. Thus, we seek to examine demographic and other characteristics that may be associated with increased burnout among working part-time MBA students in Ghana.

## **2.0 Methods**

### **2.1 Study setting**

The Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) School of Business was established in 2005 as an outgrowth of the 29-year old Department of Economics and Industrial Management which began by offering an MBA programme in 2002. The part-time MBA programme delivered over two years is designed for persons working in management or other related fields who wish to obtain a management qualification. As part of the requirements for admission onto the MBA programme, prospective applicants are required to have at least a two-year post-qualification working experience. The programme is delivered from 18.00 to 21.00 hours during the weekdays or at weekends. The rationale is to ensure that students are able to maintain their full or part-time employment status while enrolled on the course.

### **2.2 Data collection**

500 part-time MBA students of the Business School at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology in Ghana were approached and asked to complete the Areas of Worklife Survey (Leiter & Maslach, 1999). The Areas of Worklife Survey assesses respondents' demographic characteristics including gender, employment status, length of time working with organisation, managerial level and length of time in current position. It also assesses respondents' level of agreement with statements grouped into six domains, namely; workload, controls, rewards, community, fairness and values. The survey consists of five-point Likert scales, where 1 represents 'Strongly Disagree', 2 represents 'Disagree', 3 represents 'Hard to Decide', 4 represents 'Agree' and 5 represents 'Strongly Agree'. The survey includes a mixture of positively and negatively worded statements to reduce acquiescent and extreme response biases and it generally takes about 10 minutes to complete.

The students were initially given information about the survey and then requested to complete the survey forms. The study had institutional review board approval and consent was assumed to be implied once survey forms were completed and returned. Data was collected in November 2011.

### **2.3 Statistical Analysis**

Data was analysed with descriptive statistics, independent sample t-test and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 17 (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL). Before computing mean scores in the various domains, the scores for some statements were reverse coded as appropriate such that the greater the mean scores, the greater the perceived work load, controls, rewards, community, fairness or values.

### 3.0. Results

Of the 500 students approached and provided with information about the survey, 423 completed and returned the survey forms giving a response rate of 84.6%. The demographic characteristics of the respondents are as shown in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the respondents**

Variable	Percentage
<b>Gender</b>	
Male	71.6%
Female	23.4%
Not specified	5.0%
<b>Employment Status</b>	
Full time	87.2%
Part time	8.5%
Not specified	4.3%
<b>Length of time employed with industry</b>	
Less than 5 years	45.5%
5-10 years	22.7%
More than 10 years	27.7%
Not specified	2.1%
<b>Managerial level</b>	
Front line personnel	21.3%
Supervisor	14.9%
First level management	16.3%
Intermediate level management	19.1%
Senior level management	14.2%
Not specified	14.2%
<b>Length of time in present position</b>	
Less than 5 years	66.0%
5-10 years	19.1%
More than 10 years	11.3%
Not specified	3.5%

Table 2 below shows the weighted mean scores of variables in the areas of work life survey

**Table 2: Weighted mean scores for variables in the areas of work life survey**

Variable in work-life survey	N	Weighted mean scores	Std. Deviation
Workload	408	2.87	0.684
Control	420	3.59	0.906
Rewards	417	3.11	0.506
Community	414	3.61	0.616
Fairness	399	3.01	0.787
Values	417	3.55	0.746

Table 3 below shows the impact of gender on variables in the areas of work life survey

**Table 3: Comparison of the mean scores for variables in the areas of work life survey and gender**

Variable	Gender	N	Weighted mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Work load	Male	288	2.83	0.656	0.039
	Female	99	3.04	0.763	0.077
Control	Male	300	3.59	0.908	0.052
	Female	99	3.58	0.941	0.095
Rewards	Male	297	3.11	0.526	0.031
	Female	99	3.08	0.461	0.046
Community	Male	297	3.61	0.598	0.035
	Female	99	3.58	0.700	0.070
Fairness	Male	285	3.05	0.731	0.043
	Female	93	2.87	0.880	0.098
Values	Male	300	3.56	0.672	0.039
	Female	96	3.47	0.960	0.098

An independent sample t-test showed that the only significant differences in the weighted mean scores for the variables by gender type was for Workload ( $t = -2.57$ ,  $df = 385$ ,  $p = 0.01$ ) and Fairness ( $t = 1.94$ ,  $df = 379$ ,  $p = 0.05$ ).

Table 4 below shows the impact of employment status on variables in the areas of work life survey

**Table 4 Comparison of the mean scores for variables in the areas of work life survey and employment status**

Variable	Employment status	N	Weighted mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Work load	Full time	354	2.88	0.68	0.04
	Part time	36	2.54	0.67	0.11
Control	Full time	366	3.60	0.87	0.05
	Part time	36	3.42	1.32	0.22
Rewards	Full time	363	3.13	0.49	0.03
	Part time	36	2.85	0.64	0.11
Community	Full time	363	3.62	0.62	0.03
	Part time	36	3.53	0.63	0.11
Fairness	Full time	351	3.04	0.78	0.04
	Part time	30	2.87	0.81	0.15
Values	Full time	363	3.55	0.725	0.04
	Part time	36	3.55	1.021	0.17

An independent sample t-test showed that the only significant differences in the weighted mean scores for the variables by employment type was for Workload ( $t = 2.90$ ,  $df = 388$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and Reward ( $t = 3.15$ ,  $df = 397$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

Table 5 below shows the impact of the number of years respondents have been employed with their organisation on variables in the areas of work life survey.

**Table 5 Comparison of the mean scores for variables in the areas of work life survey and the number of years working with current organisation**

Variable	Years working with current organisation	N	Weighted Mean	Std Dev.
Workload	Less than 5 years	273	2.86	.692
	5-10 years	75	2.82	.559
	More than 10 years	45	2.98	.771
Fairness	Less than 5 years	258	3.01	.763
	5-10 years	81	2.93	.842
	More than 10 years	45	3.32	.714
Community	Less than 5 years	273	3.63	.551
	5-10 years	81	3.56	.704
	More than 10 years	48	3.65	.791
Rewards	Less than 5 years	273	3.16	.469
	5-10 years	81	3.02	.556
	More than 10 years	48	2.98	.582
Control	Less than 5 years	276	3.58	.948
	5-10 years	81	3.58	.849
	More than 10 years	48	3.77	.769
Values	Less than 5 years	276	3.54	.787
	5-10 years	78	3.53	.706
	More than 10 years	48	3.64	.607

An ANOVA analysis showed that there was a significant difference between the groups for Fairness ( $F= 4.05$ ,  $p= 0.02$ ) and for Rewards ( $F=4.47$ ,  $p=0.01$ ).

Post hoc comparisons using Turkey's HSD indicated that there were statistically significant differences ( $p \leq 0.05$ ) in the weighted mean scores for Fairness between students working less than 5 years and those working over 10 years but not those who had worked between 5 and 10 years with their current organisation. There was also a significant difference in scores for Fairness for those working between 5 and 10 years and those working over 10 years with their current organisation (Detailed results not shown).

Post hoc comparisons also indicated that there were statistically significant differences ( $p \leq 0.05$ ) in the weighted mean scores for Reward between students working less than 5 years and those working over 10 years as well as those working between 5 and 10 years with their current organisation. There was however no significant difference in scores for Reward for those working between 5 and 10 years and those working over 10 years with their current organisation (Detailed results not shown).

There were no significant differences between the groups for Workload, Community, Control or Values.

We also used an ANOVA to explore the between group differences in weighted mean scores for the various variables in the areas of work life survey and number of years in current position. Only Fairness showed a statistically significant difference between the groups with an  $F$  of 7.16 and  $p=0.01$ . (Weighted mean scores for 'less than 5 years'= 3.01 (SD of 0.77), '5-10 years'= 2.82 (SD of 0.76) and 'over 10 years'=3.22 (SD of). Post Hoc comparisons using the Turkey's HSD showed that the only statistically significant difference ( $p \leq 0.05$ ) was between students who had worked between 5 and 10 years and those who had worked over 10 years in their current position(Detailed results not shown).

There were no significant differences between the groups for Workload, Community, Control, Reward or Values. We also compared the mean scores in the various variables in the AWLS and managerial level as shown in Table 6.

**Table 6: Comparison of the mean scores for variables in the areas of work life survey and Managerial level**

Variable	Managerial level	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
<b>Values</b>	frontline	90	3.33	.882
	supervisor	63	3.66	.604
	management (first level)	66	3.68	.616
	management (intermediate)	81	3.56	.712
	management (senior)	60	3.83	.639
	Total	360	3.59	.731
<b>Fairness</b>	frontline	87	2.69	.636
	supervisor	57	2.82	.674
	management (first level)	66	3.39	.764
	management (intermediate)	75	3.14	.839
	management (senior)	57	3.25	.682
	Total	342	3.04	.768
<b>Community</b>	frontline	90	3.31	.727
	supervisor	60	3.56	.620
	management (first level)	66	3.78	.501
	management (intermediate)	81	3.85	.521
	management (senior)	60	3.60	.574
	Total	357	3.61	.632
<b>Rewards</b>	frontline	90	3.06	.661
	supervisor	60	3.04	.453
	management (first level)	69	3.17	.460
	management (intermediate)	81	3.08	.521
	management (senior)	60	3.14	.410
	Total	360	3.10	.522
<b>Control</b>	frontline	90	3.11	1.029
	supervisor	63	3.56	.683
	management (first level)	66	3.65	.788
	management (intermediate)	81	3.68	.981
	management (senior)	60	4.18	.651
	Total	360	3.59	.926
<b>Workload</b>	frontline	90	2.91	.805
	supervisor	63	2.99	.675
	management (first level)	66	2.96	.575
	management (intermediate)	81	2.63	.640
	management (senior)	51	2.87	.570
	Total	351	2.86	.682

An ANOVA analysis showed that there was a significant difference between the groups for all variables except for Reward ( $F=0.79$ ,  $p=0.53$ ). The F and p values for the significant results are; Values ( $F= 5.2$ ,  $p= 0.00$ ), Control ( $F= 14.28$ ,  $p=0.00$ ), Workload ( $F=3.47$ ,  $p= 0.01$ ), Community ( $F=10.47$ ,  $p= 0.00$ ) and Fairness ( $F= 11.83$ ,  $p= 0.00$ )

Post Hoc comparisons using Turkey's HSD indicated that for Values, there were statistically significant differences between front line staff and other managerial staff except intermediate management. There was however no statistically significant differences between the supervisors, first level management or senior management and other managerial groupings except frontline staff. Intermediate management showed no statistically significant difference from all other managerial groupings in the weighted mean scores for Value.

With regards to Fairness, Post Hoc comparisons indicates that the only statistically significant differences in weighted mean scores were between frontline staff and other managerial staff except supervisors and also between supervisors and first level management(Detailed results not shown).

Post Hoc comparison also showed that for Community, there were statistically significant differences between frontline staff and other managerial staff except supervisors. There were also statistically significant differences supervisors and intermediate management.

With regards to weighted means for Control, Post Hoc comparisons indicated there were statistically significant differences between frontline personnel and all other personnel. There were also statistically significant differences between senior management and all other personnel.

Finally, Post Hoc comparisons for Workload indicated that there were statistically significant differences in the weighted mean scores between intermediate management and other managerial staff except senior management (Detailed results not shown).

#### **4.0 Discussion**

Our results have shown that part-time MBA students in Ghana scored highest on three of the sub-scales of AWLS, with students being inclined to agree to the existence of high levels of community, control and values at their work place. The students also tend to find it hard to decide on their perception on the levels of fairness and on their ability to manage the quantum of the workload at their work place. A lack of a belief by employees that fairness exists within their organisations when coupled with a general perception of an unmanageable workload may suggest the existence of burnout within the student workforce.

The present results also confirm the existence of significant differences between certain groups. For example our study has shown that while female students achieved significantly higher scores than male students with regards their perception about the unmanageability of the quantum of the workload at their work place, male students achieved significantly higher scores when it came to their perception about fairness at the workplace, suggesting that female students may experience more burnout in their work place compared to their male counterparts. These results are consistent with widely held speculations that burnout occurs more frequently among women (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). If managers tend to perceive female employees as disproportionately more likely to burn out than male employees, women may be passed up for challenging assignments and promotions (Purvanova & Muros, 2010). On the other hand, our results may be an artefact which can be explained by the gender role theory, which predicts that women should be more likely to express feelings of emotional and physical fatigue whereas men should be more likely to learn to conceal their emotions (Eagly, 1987; Eagly & Wood, 1982).

We have also established that while part-time workers on the MBA programme tend to express significant disagreement about the unmanageability of the quantum of their workload, full-time workers are significantly more likely to perceive their work place as offering reward for performance. This suggests that despite being better able to handle their workload, part-time workers do not feel they are adequately rewarded for their work as compared to full-time students which could create a source of tension and invariably burnout. Furthermore, we have established that students who have worked more than 10 years with their organisations are significantly more likely to agree that there is fairness in their workplace compared to other students. This may be explained by the fact that many of those who have worked more than 10 years within an organisation may either have become accustomed to the organisations cultures, customs and practices or they may be in a position to influence fairness and equity within the organisation. Consistent with this theory, management level staff reported higher mean scores for fairness than frontline staff and supervisors. On the contrary, students who have worked less than five years with their current organisation were significantly more likely to perceive that there were rewards for performance in their workplace than all other students. These results suggest that the factors that influence burnout among these students may be multifactorial and complex.

Finally, our results has shown that there are differences in the level of agreement between students in the different managerial levels regarding their perceptions about community, fairness, workload, values and control but not rewards.

Our study has two important limitations. Firstly it does not examine the contribution of the students' academic workload to their burnout. Secondly, it does not examine the question of whether burnout at work affects performance either at work or at college.

Nowack and Hanson (1983) found a weak negative relationship between burnout and other-rated performance in college students (Nowack & Hanson, 1983), and McCarthy et. al. (1990) found a significant but low negative correlation between students' level of burnout and their grade point average (McCarthy, Pretty, & Catano, 1990). On the contrary, Balogun et al. (1996) found no relationship between burnout and cumulative grade point average (Balogun, Hoerberlein-Miller, Schneider, & Katz, 1996). Notwithstanding the limitations, our study has established that part-time MBA students in Ghana experience burnout at work which is influenced by multiple inter-related factors.

### 5.0 Acknowledgement

We are grateful to the Centre for Organizational Research and Development in Acadia University, Canada for permission to use the Areas of Worklife Survey.

**6.0 Conflict of interest:** None to declare

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