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## **The role of emotions in the occurrence of burnout among employees in port companies**

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**Abstract.** The study of emotion regulation is crucial in influencing behavior and social interactions, being essential for preventing emotional exhaustion and promoting well-being. Emotional regulation is important for port employees, being able to significantly contribute to reducing the risk of burnout by correctly managing it in interactions with customers and colleagues. The study focuses on examining the correlation between burnout and coping strategies in women, as well as identifying differences in rumination as a coping mechanism between male and female participants. The participant pool included 60 adults working in the port environment, equally divided between genders, aged between 22 and 59 years. Each participant received a unique identification code and was assured of the confidentiality of the data provided. For the evaluation, two instruments were used: the Maslach Burnout Questionnaire, which includes 25 items and measures burnout in three dimensions, and the Cognitive-Emotional Coping Questionnaire (CERQ), which includes 36 items divided into nine dimensions for analysis coping methods. The results of the study confirmed the initial hypotheses, demonstrating that there is a significant correlation between burnout and coping strategies in women, including positive refocusing, planning refocusing, and positive reappraisal. Also, significant differences in rumination as a coping mechanism were identified between male and female participants. These findings contribute to the understanding of how coping strategies can influence the level of burnout and provide useful information for the development of effective stress management interventions in the port environment.

**Keywords:** burnout, coping mechanisms, impact, emotions, stress, port environment.



## **Introduction**

In a world where emotional dynamics greatly influence human behavior and social interactions, the study of emotion regulation strategies takes on increased relevance. Emotion regulation, as theorized by Gross (1998), is a complex process by which individuals manage their emotions according to their social and personal context, thereby influencing their intensity, duration, and manifestation. This process not only moderates inner feelings, but also contributes to the psychosocial adaptability of the individual. In addition to managing emotions in everyday contexts, emotion regulation also extends to specific domains such as the workplace, where “emotional work” becomes an essential component of professional interactions (Hochschild, 1983). Employees, especially those in front-office services or those who interact directly with customers, often have to regulate their emotions in order to meet professional expectations, which can lead to phenomena such as burnout. The study of emotion regulation is therefore crucial for understanding how individuals adapt to the demands of contemporary life and for developing effective strategies to prevent emotional exhaustion in professional contexts. In this paper, we will explore the breadth and complexity of this essential field, with a particular focus on practical applicability and its long-term repercussions on psychological and professional well-being.

## **1. Research concepts**

### *1.1. Emotion regulation strategies*

Emotion regulation strategies are the processes by which individuals influence what emotions they have, when they have them, and how they experience and express these emotions (Gross, 1998, p. 275). Two widely studied aspects of emotion regulation are surface presentation and deep presentation (Hochschild, 1983). Superficial presentation occurs when a person experiences a discrepancy between the emotions they need to display in a given situation and the emotions they feel inside (Zapf, 2002).

Deep presentation, in contrast, occurs when a person actively regulates their internal emotions to align their feelings with what is needed in a given situation (Sliter, Chen, Withrow, & Sliter, 2013). When using deep presentation, one takes the time to really feel the emotion to be displayed (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993). Gross and Thompson characterized emotion regulation as goal-focused processes aimed at influencing the intensity, duration, and type of emotions experienced (Gross, 1998, p. 275). This regulation can be divided into two distinct categories: automatic (implicit) and conscious (explicit), being controlled by learned strategies to initiate, express, maintain, or modify these emotions (Gross, Sheppes, & Urry, 2011). Implicit Emotion Regulation it occurs without the individual's conscious involvement, often being triggered by the mere registration of sensory stimuli, which subsequently activate knowledge paradigms or schemas that affect psychological functions. In contrast, explicit emotion regulation requires willpower and conscious attention.

Lazarus introduced the concept of coping to illustrate how individuals navigate stressful life situations. Coping is defined as "the thoughts and behaviors people use to manage the internal and external demands of perceived stressful situations" (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004, p. 746).



Folkman and Lazarus (1980) distinguished between two main types of approach: the problem-focused approach and the emotion-focused approach. The problem-focused approach involves directly attacking the cause of stress. In contrast, the emotion-focused approach involves managing the negative emotional consequences of stressful events by changing how they are perceived and felt (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004).

Dysfunctional coping, in the context of stressful events, is characterized by behavioral (such as withdrawal of coping attempts, substance use, emotional discharge) or cognitive (such as distraction; self-blame, denial) strategies aimed at avoiding the stressful situation or the negative emotional response associated with it (Cooper, Katona, Orrell, & Livingston, 2006). The management of emotions in order to earn a salary was called "emotional work" or emotional labor (Hochschild, 1983).

### *1.2. Burnout*

Within port employees, emotions play a crucial role in the evolution of burnout. The pressure to properly manage emotions in interactions with customers and colleagues can lead to emotional exhaustion. Also, dysfunctional stress management strategies can amplify the risk of burnout (Schaufeli & Maslach, 2017). Understanding this effect is crucial for implementing strategies to prevent and manage burnout among port workers.

Burnout develops over the long term as a result of exposure to chronic emotional and interpersonal stress in the work environment and is manifested by three main aspects: cynicism, feelings of ineffectiveness and exhaustion. The past 25 years of research has established the complexity of the construct and places the individual experience of stress within a broader organizational context of people's relationship to their work. Recently, work on burnout has expanded internationally and led to new conceptual models. A focus on engagement, the positive antithesis of burnout, promises to provide new insights into burnout mitigation interventions. The social focus of burnout, the strong research base on the syndrome, and its specific links to the work domain make a distinct and valuable contribution to people's health and well-being (Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter, 2001).

The term burnout was coined to describe a psychological syndrome in which the individual experiences a negative emotional reaction to the workplace as a result of prolonged exposure to a stressful work environment (Maslach and Jackson, 1984; Maslach et al., 2001). . The original research on burnout, which was conducted in the 1970s using interviews, surveys, and field observations, focused primarily on people working in human service professions such as health care, social services, education, and legal services (Maslach, 1976, 1979, 1982; Maslach and Jackson, 1982, 1984). However, over the years, burnout has become a phenomenon of notable global significance and is recognized to affect individuals in a wide range of occupations. Maslach and Jackson (1986) conceptualize burnout as having three dimensions, namely, emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal fulfillment that may occur among individuals who work with people in some capacity.

Maslach described three dimensions of burnout:

- a) Exhaustion: a feeling of being overextended, both emotionally and physically.
- b) Cynicism: adopting a cold and cynical attitude towards responsibilities.
- c) Inefficiency: the feeling of inadequacy and being ineffective.

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Exhaustion is central and the most obvious manifestation of this syndrome. Although a necessary criterion for burnout, focusing exclusively on burnout may ignore other important aspects of the individual's relationship to work. Exhaustion is the most widely reported and most thoroughly analyzed. The strong identification of burnout with burnout has led some to argue that the other two aspects of the syndrome are incidental or unnecessary (Shirom 1989). Burnout reveals stress, but does not completely cover the individual's connection to work. It leads to emotional and cognitive distancing from work, sometimes as a way to cope with professional overload, especially in the human services field.

Depersonalization/Cynicism involves distancing oneself from service recipients, ignoring the qualities that make them unique and engaging. Distancing is an immediate reaction to burnout, and the close connection between burnout and cynicism is consistent in burnout research.

Ineffectiveness/Inefficiency refers to feelings of personal unfulfillment and can be the result of burnout or cynicism. Sometimes ineffectiveness occurs in parallel with the other aspects of burnout, rather than in a clear sequence (Lee & Ashforth 1996). A work situation with chronic, overwhelming demands that contribute to burnout or cynicism is likely to erode one's sense of efficacy. Exhaustion interferes with effectiveness. However, in other work contexts, ineffectiveness appears to develop in parallel with the other two aspects of burnout, rather than sequentially.

The effects of burnout can be divided into two categories: those that affect the individual and those that influence the overall productivity of the organization or may contribute to work-related stress and depressive disorders (Tennant, 2001). Personal consequences were described, such as the onset of depressive disorders as a result of stress. The impact of employee burnout on the organization includes reduced performance and job satisfaction, decreased commitment to the organization, and increased absenteeism and staff turnover (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993).

## **2. Research methodology**

### **2.1. Research objectives**

Identifying the relationship between coping strategies and burnout in women employed in the port environment.

Identifying differences between men and women in rumination as a coping mechanism.

### **2.2. Research hypotheses**

1. It is hypothesized that there is a correlation between coping strategies and burnout in women for:

- -Positive refocusing
- -Refocusing on planning
- -Positive reassessment

2. It is hypothesized that there are significant differences in rumination as a coping mechanism depending on the gender of the participants.



### 2.3. The batch of participants

The group of participants consists of 60 adults working in the port environment between the ages of 22 and 59, of which 30 are female and 30 are male. Each participant had a unique identification code and was assured of the confidentiality of the information they provided for the researched data.

### 2.4. Research tools

The instruments used in this research were the following questionnaires:

- Maslach Burnout Questionnaire (This questionnaire has 25 items in total and consists of 3 scales)
- Cognitive-Emotional Coping Questionnaire (CERQ) (This questionnaire has 36 items and consists of 9 scales)

### 3. Analysis and interpretation of results

**Testing Hypothesis 1. It is hypothesized that there is a correlation between coping strategies and burnout in women for positive refocusing, refocusing on planning, positive reassessment.**

**1. It is hypothesized that there is a correlation between positive refocusing and burnout.**

Tabel 1- First hypothesis results

size	Gender	Normality Tests		Pearson/ Spearman	Sig. (2- tailed)
		Shapiro-Wilk <i>Statistic</i>	<i>Sig.</i>		
Positive refocusing	Female	.086	.200*	<b>Pearson= -.451*</b>	.012
Refocus on planning	Female	.169	.028	<b>Spearman= -.391*</b>	.033
Positive review	Female	.136	.165	<b>Pearson= -.409*</b>	.025
Burnout	Female	.133	.189		

After applying the normality test, it is observed that the distribution of scores is normal, a fact confirmed by the data presented in table 1, the sig for the female gender has the value 0.200, and the sig for burnout has the value 0.189. Thus, we applied the Pearson test for a parametric correlation, obtaining a correlation coefficient of  $-.451^*$  and the sig value is less than 0.05 (sig=0.012). So, the hypothesis is confirmed, so there is a negative correlation between coping strategies in women for positive refocusing and burnout.





Thus, from the psychological point of view of interpreting the statistical results, the more women use an awareness and reorientation of attention from the negative or stressful aspects of a situation to positive or less stressful aspects, the more the burnout syndrome, which involves an emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and the decrease of personal achievements, is more diminished. The more women adopt awareness strategies and change focus from negative or stressful aspects to positive or less challenging ones, the lower the risk of burnout. Women who are able to channel their attention to the positive aspects of life or find constructive ways to cope with stress may experience protection against severe burnout. Thus, this result underlines the crucial role of positive refocusing-oriented coping strategies in promoting psychological well-being and preventing the negative consequences associated with burnout.

The confirmed hypothesis suggests that, among women, the use of positive refocusing as a coping strategy is associated with lower levels of burnout.

Studies show that positive refocusing can be effective in reducing stress and burnout. For example, a landmark study by Fredrickson and colleagues (2003) showed that practicing positive refocusing can improve moods and resilience to stress. By focusing on personal resources and opportunities for professional growth, women can reduce feelings of burnout and discouragement. Positive refocusing strengthens psychological resilience by providing constructive ways to manage professional stress and pressures, helping to maintain a healthy balance in the professional sphere.

The finding that positive refocusing is effective in managing burnout in women provides a basis for the development of psychological interventions and training programs that promote this technique as part of a package of coping strategies. This emphasizes the importance of integrating positive self-care and personal development practices into daily life to prevent and manage burnout.

## **2. It is hypothesized that there is a correlation between planning refocus and burnout.**

The analysis of the statistical data (table 1) highlights the fact that the sig for the female gender has a value of 0.028, and the sig for burnout has a value of 0.189. Thus, the Spearman test was used for a non-parametric correlation, obtaining a correlation coefficient of  $-.391^*$  and the sig value is less than 0.05 (sig=0.033). So, the hypothesis is confirmed, so there is a negative correlation between women's coping strategies for refocusing on planning and burnout.

According to the psychological interpretation of the analysis of the statistical results, the more women focus on planning activities and prioritizing tasks, the more the risk of exhaustion and excessive stress characteristic of burnout is reduced. This means that the planning-centered approach to stress management may be beneficial in preventing the negative manifestations of burnout among women. This strategy facilitates effective prioritization of responsibilities, providing opportunities for maintaining work-life balance. The proactive approach encouraged by planning facilitates problem solving and reduces feelings of uncertainty and tension. When goals set through planning are achieved, this can reinforce feelings of job satisfaction and fulfillment, acting as a protective mechanism against burnout. The confirmed hypothesis suggests that among women, the use of refocusing on planning as a coping strategy is associated with lower levels of burnout.



Research suggests that refocusing on planning can be helpful in managing burnout and work-related stress. For example, a landmark study by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) highlighted that the development of planning strategies can improve adaptive and problem-solving abilities.

The finding that refocusing on planning helps in managing burnout in women suggests the need for interventions and training programs that encourage this technique. Integrating self-care practices and positive personal development into daily life is critical to preventing and managing burnout. Thus, a refocus on planning becomes a crucial part of strategies aimed at providing women with the necessary resources to protect their mental health and maintain balance in the professional environment.

### **3. It is assumed that there is a correlation between positive reappraisal and burnout.**

The analysis of the statistical data (table 1) highlights the fact that the sig for the female gender has a value of 0.165, and the sig for burnout has a value of 0.189. Thus, we applied the Pearson test for a parametric correlation, obtaining a correlation coefficient of  $-.409^*$  and the sig value is less than 0.05 (sig=0.025). So, the hypothesis is confirmed, so there is a negative correlation between coping strategies in women for positive reappraisal and burnout.

According to the psychological interpretation of the analysis of the statistical results, the more women reinterpret stressful situations in a more positive way and identify the benefits they can provide, the lower the levels of burnout. Adopting a positive perspective can reduce the negative impact of stress and pressures in the professional environment, contributing to strengthening psychological resilience. This mindset fosters adaptability and confidence in the ability to overcome challenges, thereby reducing feelings of burnout and discouragement. Therefore, the ability to positively reinterpret situations can be a valuable resource in preventing and managing burnout in women in the work context. The confirmed hypothesis suggests that among women, the use of positive reappraisal as a coping strategy is associated with lower levels of burnout.

A landmark study by Folkman and Moskowitz (2000) found that finding meaning and meaning in stressful experiences can promote personal growth and adaptation to stress. The study was conducted to investigate the relationship between burnout, coping strategies and sense of coherence in an engineering environment. A cross-sectional survey design was used to assess these relationships among 118 engineers and scientists in a global engineering organization. Participants completed the MBI, COPE, and SOC questionnaires to assess levels of burnout, coping strategies, and sense of coherence. The results showed that there is a significant relationship between these constructs. Specifically, focus and discharge of emotions, as well as sense of coherence, were found to be predictors of emotional exhaustion and cynicism. Sense of coherence was also associated with greater professional efficacy. These findings suggest that coping strategies can play an important role in the prevention and management of burnout in the work environment. More attention to the development of healthy coping skills and support to strengthen the sense of coherence could help improve well-being and professional performance in this area (Viljoen, A. 2012).

Burnout threatens the mental and physical health of individuals and also lowers satisfaction levels and productivity in relation to the workplace. Until now, studies on how to deal with burnout in the work environment have mainly focused on identifying the factors in the





workplace that are related to this problem. Coping strategies affect the cognitive and behavioral efforts that an individual makes in the face of stressful situations and are considered to be moderators of burnout. This exploratory study investigated the adaptive behavior of construction professionals in their work environment. It was designed to provide fundamental knowledge in deriving the most effective coping strategies for workplace stressors. An online questionnaire was adopted and a total of 342 valid responses were received. The factor analysis revealed that there are adaptation behaviors that can be satisfactorily described by several dimensions that correlate with burnout. Ongoing research based on these findings will attempt to identify the most effective coping strategies associated with low levels of burnout (Brenda & Steve, 2006).

These coping techniques are related to the ability to manage emotions and manage stress. The findings indicate that women who frequently use these techniques show lower levels of burnout and may experience greater well-being in their professional environment.

**Testing hypothesis 2. It is assumed that there are significant differences in rumination as a coping mechanism depending on the gender of the participants.**

Tabel 2 – Rezultate a doua ipoteză

Size	Gender	Normality Tests Shapiro-Wilk Statistic Sig.	T-test / Levene	Sig. (2- tailed)
rumination	Male	.146 .100	<b>Levene Sig= .145</b>	<b>.001</b>
	Female	.112 .200*		

After applying the normality test, it is observed that the distribution of scores is normal. According to the result in table 1, sig for female is 0.200 and sig for male is 0.100. Thus, we applied the Levene test for a parametric distribution, obtaining a sig of 0.001. So, the hypothesis is confirmed, so there are significant differences in rumination as a coping mechanism between the gender of the participants.

Significant gender differences in the use of rumination as a coping mechanism show that women and men respond differently to stress. Rumination is the repeated process of reflecting and preoccupying negative thoughts, emotions, and experiences. It is considered to be a coping mechanism or adaptation to stress. In general, it is associated with less effective adaptation to stress and may lead to greater anxiety and depression (Nolen-Hoeksema, 1991). Studies suggest that there are differences in how men and women use rumination as a stress management strategy, but these differences may vary by context and other factors, with rumination being more common in women than men.

This may be attributed to differences in socialization, where women are often encouraged to be more introspective and express their emotions, which may lead to a greater tendency to ruminate. Conversely, men may prefer to avoid or minimize discussion of their feelings, not using this coping strategy and preferring to solve problems through action or distraction from negative thoughts. Women may also be more open to sharing and exploring their emotions in



detail, which can fuel the rumination process. Also, women may be more likely to internalize and ruminate on criticism or failure, while men may be more inclined to minimize or externalize their negative emotions.

Studies have shown that this strategy can be used to cope with stress and adversity in life. However, recent research, such as that conducted by Smith and colleagues in 2020, suggests that there are differences between men and women in how they use rumination as a coping mechanism (Smith, 2020). According to this research, women seem to resort to rumination more often in stressful situations compared to men. Another study aimed to deepen understanding of the role that a maladaptive emotion regulation strategy—such as rumination—might play in changes in physiological response and in the engagement of dysfunctional attentional strategies. It used a multimodal assessment, including self-reports (the Rumination and Reflection Questionnaire and the Emotion Regulation Difficulties Scale), physiological measures (heart rate variability recording), and attention tasks (the Stroop Task) to examine multiple aspects of rumination in according to genres. The sample consisted of 68 people (30 men and 38 women). Study findings showed that rumination was higher in women than men, but in men it appeared to be strongly associated with poorer emotional regulation overall (Ando et al., 2020).

This finding may have important implications for understanding and addressing individual mental health and well-being, as different coping strategies may influence how a person manages and adapts to life's challenges. Thus, this investigation not only brings into question gender differences in rumination as a coping mechanism, but also highlights the importance of considering these differences in the development of intervention and support strategies for individuals' mental health and psychological well-being.

### **Conclusions**

In conclusion, the results of this study indicate that there is a significant correlation between burnout and coping strategies in women, especially for positive refocusing, planning refocusing, and positive reappraisal. Data analysis confirmed the initial hypothesis, showing that these coping strategies are associated with lower levels of burnout among women. Specifically, participants who frequently used these coping strategies showed lower levels of emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and lack of professional efficacy. These findings suggest that encouraging and enhancing the use of positive refocusing, planning refocusing, and positive reappraisal coping strategies could be effective strategies for preventing and managing burnout among women. These data can make a valuable contribution to the development of intervention programs and to the improvement of the psychological well-being and mental health of women in the work environment. The obtained results confirm our hypothesis, which highlights that there are significant differences between the sexes regarding the use of rumination as an adaptation strategy. Studies show that women tend to ruminate more often, while in men, it may be associated with poorer emotional regulation.

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