

A Grounded Theory of Burnout and Success Stories in Psychology Graduate School

Mahmood Salim Almaawali
Sultan Qaboos University, Oman

Yousef Abu Shindi
Sultan Qaboos University, Oman

Mustafa Ali Khalaf, PhD
Sultan Qaboos University, Oman

Yusen Zhai, PhD
University of Florida, USA

ABSTRACT

Literature on burnout and stress among psychology graduate students is predominantly cross-sectional, with limited qualitative analysis exploring these phenomena within psychology education. This constructivist grounded theory study interviewed 11 recent graduates from four distinct psychology sub-fields: counseling, measurement, educational psychology, and learning disabilities. This study explored how graduates mitigated burnout and successfully graduated. Findings yielded a process-oriented theoretical model indicating that academic stress slowly developed into psychological burnout, particularly during thesis stage. Both social support networks and intrinsic motivation were the two primary factors buffering against psychological burnout. Self-care, persistence, and psychological resilience were also significant variables in mitigating burnout. These findings provide implications for graduate education and scholarship.

Keywords: Burnout, Graduate Students, Motivation, Psychology, Social Support Network, Stress

© Author(s), 2026. Published by Star Scholars Press.

This article is distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

INTRODUCTION

Although a major academic discipline, psychology has been criticized for being "inadequate in preparing graduates to meet the challenges of society today" (Khoury & De Castro Pecanha, 2023, p.1). Postgraduate students often experience significant psychological distress, with many struggling with burnout (White et al., 2023). Some studies have documented a high prevalence of mental distress (34.6%) among psychology graduate students, and 70.5% reported a perceived necessity for professional mental health care (Negash et al., 2020). Other recent investigations reported that approximately 40% of postgraduate students exhibited moderate to severe symptoms of anxiety and depression (Hazell et al., 2021). Burnout appears to be a common challenge for psychology graduate students, and these struggles are sometimes attributed to difficulties in supervisory relationships (Xie, Yu & Xu, 2026). When supervisors validate and address graduate student stress, they can play a pivotal role in academic success (White et al., 2023).

Graduate-level training in psychology and health professions is inherently rigorous (He et al., 2025; Rico & Bunge, 2021). Students are tasked with managing demanding coursework, significant research responsibilities, and emotionally challenging clinical placements (Swords & Ellis, 2017), often compounded by financial strain and ambiguous career trajectories. These cumulative pressures contribute to elevated rates of burnout and psychological distress (Jabbarov et al., 2023; Olson et al., 2025), with a particular impact observed among students who are married, have children, or are women (Remojo & Cacho, 2026; Remaker et al., 2021; Hudson & O'Regan, 1994). Burnout, characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a diminished sense of accomplishment, has been consistently associated with mental health difficulties, such as anxiety and depression (Adu et al., 2025; Mahamid et al., 2025), and inadequate sleep among the graduate student population (Allen et al., 2021). Recent meta-analytic evidence shows that emotional exhaustion was one of the strongest predictors of psychological distress among graduate level students and trainees in the US (Jahanaray, Pasha, & Jahanaray, 2026).

Prior research has examined potential enhancements for the supportive nature of training environments. Fraizer et al. (2025) employed a visual constructivist grounded theory approach to ascertain critical psychosocial characteristics within students' academic settings that could facilitate student success. A sense of belongingness to the university aided students in maintaining engagement with their studies, utilizing diverse self-regulation strategies, and attaining academic achievement (Fraizer et al., 2025). Consequently, educators ought to prioritize the cultivation of a trauma-informed learning environment in university contexts by fostering connections and establishing clear expectations with students (Harvey et al., 2024). Compared to other disciplines, some psychology graduate students may be uniquely vulnerable due to the emotional labor inherent in therapeutic work and prolonged exposure to client trauma (Butler, Carello & Maguin, 2017; Pirelli, Formon & Maloney, 2020). Concurrently, systemic barriers, such as inadequate institutional support, persistent stigma surrounding help-seeking (Klein et al., 2023), and heavy financial demands, can exacerbate this stress (Toussaint et al., 2025; Cardoso et al., 2025).

While attention to burnout has been increasing within medical and health professions education (Toussaint et al., 2025; Yang, Liu & Huang, 2022), research specifically addressing burnout among psychology graduate students remains scarce (Nkrumah et al., 2025; Schwarz & Cooper, 2024). Furthermore, identity factors, such as gender and cultural background, continue to influence burnout within psychology training in ways that are not yet fully elucidated (Zhai & Prescod, 2025). Collectively, these deficiencies highlight the necessity for additional research on graduate student burnout to reveal some of the distinctive challenges inherent in psychology training and to propose interventions specifically adapted to this environment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Burnout and Mental Health in Graduate Education

Burnout among graduate students frequently co-occurs with depression, anxiety, and diminished engagement (Ting, Cheng & Zhang, 2023; Olson et al., 2025; Adu et al., 2025). Systematic reviews of studies published prior to 2022 in major publishing outlets indicate that approximately 35% of graduate students exhibit clinically significant levels of anxiety (Ting, Cheng & Zhang, 2023). Furthermore, other studies have reported that nearly one-third (33%) of psychology graduate students in Canada displayed significant signs of depression (Peluso, Carleton, & Asmundson, 2011). These challenges were aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to issues such as financial precarity and increased academic demands (Balakrishnan et al., 2023). Beyond ephemeral crises, burnout persists as a structural issue inherent in graduate psychology programs, where

intense performance pressures and inadequate support perpetuate cycles of stress (Tiêt, Brooks & Patton, 2024).

Psychological Burnout

Psychological burnout was initially conceptualized by Freudenberger (1974), who characterized it as a process involving physical and emotional exhaustion, fatigue, detachment, and self-doubt. Subsequently, Maslach and Pines (1977) refined this definition, underscoring the persistent nature of burnout, which encompasses three principal dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment. These dimensions collectively precipitate a condition where individuals are overwhelmed by their obligations, experience difficulty engaging empathetically with clients or colleagues, and ultimately doubt their professional efficacy. For the purposes of this investigation, Maslach's definition of burnout served as the foundational framework for the interview protocol.

Stress and Graduate Training

Recent scholarship has underscored the vulnerability of postgraduate students to mental health challenges (Hazel et al., 2021; White et al., 2024; Woolston, 2019). Numerous postgraduate researchers document experiences of stress, anxiety, and social isolation (Moss et al., 2022). Psychology programs introduce supplementary demands on students, arising from the emotionally arduous nature of practicum assignments and extensive periods of unremunerated or inadequately compensated clinical training (El-Ghoroury et al., 2012; Miller, Postill & Andrews, 2023). A substantial proportion of counseling students, for instance, experience vicarious traumatization, frequently culminating in compassion fatigue, emotional exhaustion, and apprehensions regarding long-term career feasibility (Jahanaray, Pasha, & Jahanaray, 2026; Baker, 2012; Jabbarov et al., 2023). Interdisciplinary comparisons suggest that psychology students report a heightened susceptibility to burnout when contrasted with individuals in other disciplines (Kourea, et al., 2023; Rico & Bunge, 2021). One investigation reported that approximately 49% of psychology graduate students exhibited strong indicators of anxiety, and about 39% displayed depressive symptomatology (Rummell, 2015). These difficulties may be attributable to financial struggles, with female students and those from underrepresented populations experiencing a disproportionate impact (Remaker et al., 2021).

Barriers to Mental Health Seeking

Several barriers to help seeking can intensify stress. Stigma associated with mental health seeking; for instance, can dissuade numerous students from utilizing available support resources (Al Omari et al., 2023). Consequently, stigma may reinforce an unspoken culture of suffering and professional inadequacy (Liu et al.,

2019). Despite burnout, many graduate students may refrain from help seeking, which might be a result of gender or cultural backgrounds of graduate students (Moss et al., 2022). Overtime, graduate school pressure can lead to impostor feelings, which have been correlated with elevated anxiety and increased intentions of dropout (Zhai, Almaawali & Banish, 2023; Richardson, Trusty & George, 2020). These challenges can exacerbate among women and minority students who frequently encounter structural disadvantages due to lack of support and isolation (Cardoso et al., 2025; Remaker et al., 2021). For example, child-care can increase burnout among married female students, which leave can leave a cascading effect on academic duties (Wilkins-Yel et al., 2024; Klein et al., 2023). The same challenge can be faced by students from underrepresented backgrounds as they lack strong social support networks. Limited support, whether social, academic, or financial can impede success in graduate training (Heckler et al., 2025).

Stress and Coping

Teaching graduate students on coping skills and interventions within graduate education remains underdeveloped. However, some research suggests that social support, advisor support, grit and motivation were partially predictive of burnout among psychology students, which could diminish with increased ongoing stress (Lillelien, Menichelli & Bjaalid, 2026; Kovach Clark, Murdock & Koetting, 2009). Mental health seeking, wellness interventions, sleep quality, and social support can also mitigate burnout (El-Ghoroury et al., 2012). Sleep hygiene, for instance, was an effective coping mechanism for stress reduction for graduate students (Allen et al., 2021).

In other graduate programs, such as medical education, Enhanced Stress-Resilience Training has demonstrated beneficial outcomes (Sanders et al., 2025). Psychology graduate students could also benefit from cognitive appraisal of stress, which entails training students in areas such as occupational safety to foster a balanced integration of life and work demands (Simões, et al., 2023). Other research has suggested that targeted exercise interventions can help graduate students cope with stress by decreasing stress inducing hormones (Wu et al., 2025). Prior research has also examined the role of cognitive reappraisal in attenuating stress levels (Smith & Ellsworth, 1985). Cognitive appraisal, defined as an individual's attempt to contextualize stressors and challenges, may potentially mitigate feelings of burnout, thereby enhancing coping capacity (Folkman et al., 1986).

Our understanding of burnout in psychology training is still limited. Most of the existing literature is cross sectional and descriptive, with most studies including students during graduate school. A retrospective investigation may shed more accurate understanding of burn out and can provide a more accurate account of burn out experiences. Psychology graduate students face several pressures such as the expectation to achieve proficiency in clinical practice and research, frequent

exposure to the emotional traumas, overseeing intricate research endeavors, and maneuvering a highly competitive academic milieu (Appleseth et al., 2024). This composite burden can diminish emotional reserves, precipitating sentiments of estrangement and discontent. Therefore, the main research question in this study is: *how do psychology graduate students successfully cope with burnout and graduate?* Throughout this paper, we aim to dissect and describe what causes burnout and how it gets mitigated during psychology graduate school.

RESEARCH METHOD

Design

Despite existing literature on burnout in psychology graduate students (Jabbarov et al., 2023; Zhai, Almaawali & Bannish, 2023; Kourea et al., 2023; Hudson, & O'Regan, 1994), no Grounded Theory (GT) studies have explored this population's burnout dynamics. This interpretive, constructivist, and retrospective study uses Charmaz's (2014) GT to explore psychological burnout and career success among recent psychology graduate program alumni, offering unique insight, particularly on post-academia detachment. Unlike cross-sectional literature primarily from other fields, this GT focuses on psychology graduate students' lived experiences, exploring burnout dynamics, contributing factors, successful adaptation strategies, and coping mechanisms.

Using a constructivist Grounded Theory (GT) approach (Charmaz, 2014), data and theory are co-created by participants and researchers, focusing on meaning, context, and subjective experience (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2017). Our interpretations were influenced by our pre-existing assumptions as psychologist educators, stemming from our experience teaching graduate students (Mills, Bonner & Francis, 2006). Therefore, our personal experiences may have affected and co-created the data interpretations.

As researchers, our close and regular interaction with the data through ongoing research meetings was crucial for interpreting the interview narratives (Charmaz, 2008). This continuous analysis led to adapting or incorporating new follow-up questions, and minor modifications to the primary questions, as findings emerged, and data exploration deepened. This comprehensive process ultimately yielded a contextualized interpretation, ensuring the findings represent plausible understandings of the study's phenomena.

Participants and Sampling

For this study, 11 recent graduates from psychology graduate programs were selected using theoretical sampling. The participants (see Table 1) were chosen based on their willingness to share detailed narratives about their experiences with burnout and their perceptions regarding future career prospects. Written informed consent was obtained at the onset of each interview. Participants were recruited

based on diversity in psychology major or emphasis, years of experience, marital status while in the program, work status, and study mode. These variables were important to enrich emergent findings and link what was shared across diversity of backgrounds. For instance, some of the early participants were married and had children. To select the next participant, we looked for unmarried participants or participants from a different psychology sub-field who also had a different experience to explore whether shared struggles existed.

Table 1: Participants' Characteristics

No.	Years post-graduation	Work Status	Gender	Study Mode	Marital Status	Psychology Major
1	4	Yes	Male	part-time	M	Measurement & Evaluation
2	3	Yes	Female	part-time	M	Educational Psychology
3	2	Yes	Female	full-time	S	Counseling
4	1	Yes	Female	full-time	M	Career Counseling
5	1	No	Female	full-time	S	Career Counseling
6	2	Yes	Female	full-time	M	Counseling
7	1	Yes	Male	part-time	M	Learning Disabilities
8	Less than 1	Yes	Female	part-time	S	Learning Disabilities
9	1	No	Male	part-time	S	Educational Psychology
10	Less than 1	No	Female	part-time	M	Educational Psychology
11	Less than 1	No	Female	full-time	S	Counseling

Note. M= Married; S= Single.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted remotely via Google Meet, utilizing a pilot-tested interview guide. The duration of the interviews ranged from 40 to 90 minutes. All interviews were audio-recorded, meticulously transcribed verbatim, and subsequently verified for accuracy. Identifying information was systematically removed to ensure strict confidentiality. Data collection transpired between March and December 2025.

The interview protocol was specifically designed to elicit detailed narratives regarding participants' experiences of academic and clinical stress, the manifestation of burnout symptomatology, and the resultant impact of these experiences on their professional career expectations. The recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and subsequently subjected to analysis utilizing grounded theory techniques. Two assistant researchers were formally trained to conduct the interviews, while the co-authors attended the sessions to pose targeted follow-up inquiries. Preliminary results were also consistently shared and discussed with the team including the research assistants so that they constantly compared findings with interviewee answers.

Key interview questions focused on:

1. Descriptions of feelings related to burnout (e.g., emotional exhaustion, depersonalization)
2. The influence of academic demands on personal well-being, including self-care and mental health during the program of study
3. Descriptions of processes related to dealing with burnout and ways to mitigate it.
4. The roles and processes within support systems (e.g., supervisory relationships, peer support) in mitigating burnout

Consensus Approach

Researchers independently coded transcripts, met regularly to compare coding, and discussed all disagreements until consensus was reached. Disagreements were resolved through discussion, review of codebook definitions, and transcript re-examination. A senior researcher facilitated unresolved disagreements, and all decisions were documented in a decision log. The focus was on in-depth discussion rather than statistical measures.

Data Analysis

The interview transcripts were subjected to an open line-by-line coding process (See Figure 1), which emphasized the co-construction of meaning (Charmaz, 2014). Initially, open line-by-line coding was employed to identify nascent codes emerging from the data, utilizing the same gerunds articulated by participants to capture processes and actions. Codes were collaboratively created

and retained the format shared by the participants. Through continuous comparison across interviews and the dissemination of preliminary codes to subsequent participants, codes were clustered (around interview 6) into more abstract, focused codes (see Table 2). The goal was to link categories and explore the interrelationships between experiences of burnout and other experiences. These focused codes were subsequently refined (around interview 8) into conceptual categories (e.g., social support, emotional burnout, resilience, motivation) and grouped into broader concepts that encapsulated the essence of the participants' experiences.

Data saturation began to form at about interview 8 as we did not find new or surprising stories. To further data saturation, similar processes, actions, and emotions were aggregated into larger themes (interviews 9, 10 & 11) to refine the emergent theoretical framework. Following the completion of each of the final three interviews, findings were co-constructed and discussed with participants, seeking contextual meaning-making and supporting evidence. All participants corroborated the findings and provided further elaboration to justify their agreement.

Two coders analyzed the qualitative data using MaxQDA 24, systematically identifying patterns and divergent perspectives. The software managed and color-coded interview texts for categorization. Regular meetings and codebook revisions (twice by interview 8) ensured inter-coder agreement on coding and categorization.

Reflexivity

The research team ensured reflexivity through consistent discussions and employed reflexive memo-writing to ensure transparency and provide an audit trail for category development and the emerging theoretical model (See Figure 1). Memos documented analytic decisions, shifting interpretations, and researchers' subjective viewpoints. Theme development was iterative, involving continuous engagement with data, codes, interviews, personal experiences, and evolving interpretations. Memos, recorded in data files, facilitated reflexive engagement, often posing questions like, "What is happening? How do they deal with stress?" and noting observations such as the role of "Life circumstances" or that "working and non-working students varied in stress level."

The authors integrated their own experiences while minimizing assumptions. The research team and assistants held regular meetings to discuss surprising answers, modify questions, refine codes and categories, and adjust interview follow-up questions based on preliminary findings from previous interviews.

Context of the Current Study

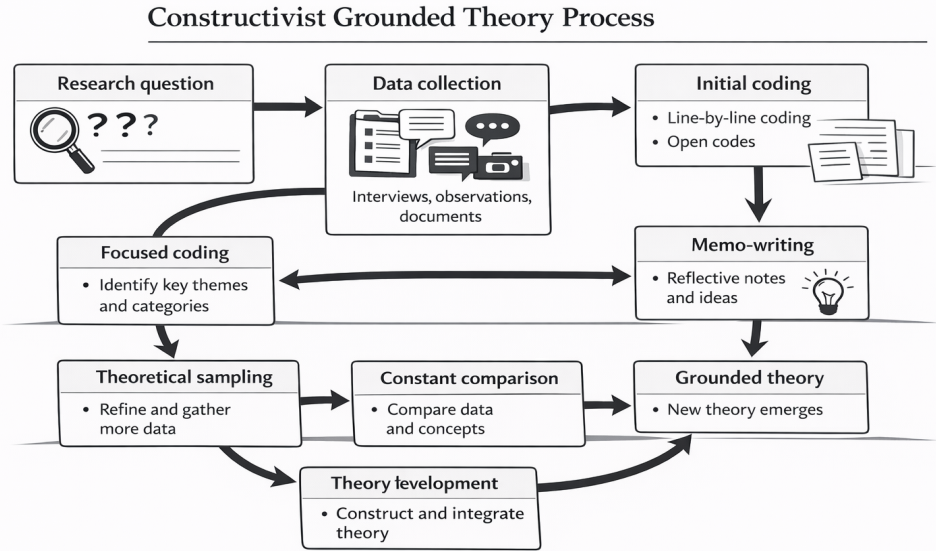
This investigation was conducted at a major public university in Oman. The psychology programs admit students from diverse educational backgrounds, the majority of whom are employed adults. Master's level programs typically require

approximately two to three years for completion and necessitate both academic coursework and a research-based thesis. As most programs operate on a part-time basis, enrolled students are usually employed concurrently, and only a small fraction can secure study leave. Students are responsible for tuition and all other associated expenses, as sponsorship opportunities are highly limited.

Ethical Considerations

This study strictly adhered to the rigorous ethical standards delineated by the Declaration of Helsinki. Prior to participation, all individuals provided informed consent, and absolute confidentiality was meticulously maintained. Participants were assured that their identities would remain anonymous in all disseminated materials. Ethical approval (REAAF/EDU/PSYCHOLOGY/2024/07) was obtained from the pertinent institutional review board at Sultan Qaboos University prior to the initiation of the study.

Figure 1: *Grounded Theory Process used in Analyzing Psychological Burnout*



RESULTS

Analysis of the interview transcripts, employing an iterative approach, yielded several salient themes characterizing the experience of burnout among psychology graduate students. These themes encompassed both the personal and professional facets of burnout and demonstrated a strong correlation with participants' outlook regarding their prospective careers.

Table 2: Code, Category, and Theme Emergence

No	Main Themes	Sub-codes	Brief Description
1	Support Network	Social support, group study, study habits, peer support, professor support, family support.	Any statements that describe value of social interactions in reducing stress/burnout support.
2	Emotional Burnout	Depersonalization, life work conflict, work related stress, feeling tired, feeling hopeless.	Any statements indicating feeling disinterested or helpless about schooling or work
3	Intrinsic Motivation	Self-actualization needs, self-care habits, personal accomplishment, goal setting, reminding self of personal goals.	Any meaning units that clearly describes fighting for or working hard to graduate
4	Reduced sense of personal accomplishment	discrepancy between reality and expectations, negative career expectations, feeling lost, not seeing value in schooling	Any statements showing negative expectations or not sensing progress in schoolwork + career related stress

All participants reported entering the field of psychology with considerable enthusiasm for graduate study. Nevertheless, this initial excitement gradually diminished as the demands proved exceedingly difficult to manage. Certain participants, particularly those with limited post-baccalaureate experience, expressed confusion regarding the high level of academic pressure compared to their undergraduate education. The following section details the progression by which this enthusiasm transformed into academic and psychological difficulties over the course of their graduate studies.

Emotional Burnout

Emotional exhaustion, commonly referred to as burnout, was a dominant theme emerging from the data (See Table. 2). Participants consistently articulated feeling overwhelmed by the relentless demands of academic coursework, clinical duties, and the emotional burden of supporting clients in distress. For example, Participant 6 admitted, "Some days I felt I didn't care, especially when I felt burned out due to school demands." Participant 2 elaborated on feelings of detachment, stating, "I felt I was fighting for my rights. I was trying hard to shift majors. I lost interest in studying. I graduated late." While Participant 8 viewed emotional

burnout as a predictable component of graduate school, they highlighted that the primary difficulty was often related to external negative feedback. "My family would say, 'Why are you studying? Take care of your children. Studying would not help advance you at work,' she shared." Similarly, Participant 11 captured the internal struggle, adding, "sometimes I asked myself why I was studying? Why all of this?"

Reduced Sense of Personal Accomplishment

Decrease in feelings of personal accomplishment was a significant finding. Participants frequently questioned their efficacy as future professionals. "Sometimes I would work for days on a task and then suddenly felt like I accomplished nothing," shared participant 1. This uncertainty regarding personal competence was often linked to the intense pressure to excel academically and clinically. "At some point I felt I had enough. I cannot continue. I wish to withdraw from the program," participant 5 stated. Consequently, participants reported a persistent feeling that their contributions were insufficient or went unrecognized. This sentiment was particularly emphasized by participant 7, who is legally blind. "I work hard, double or triple that of my colleagues. I had to read the text fully just to find the information I was seeking. I sometimes required someone to read it for me," he recounted. The same experience was narrated by participant 10. "I sometimes felt like I wanted to drop out, but I could not. There were considerable family expectations to meet," she shared. This struggle was also evident in interview 11: "When I received harsh feedback, I doubted if I should continue," she complained.

Career uncertainty also contributed to a reduced sense of accomplishment, with one participant noting lack of job vacancies despite extensive searching. Burnout significantly altered participants' career expectations. One participant, who initially had high hopes for a counseling career, stated, "Now everything's changed." Many felt the intensity of their training was overly stressful, undermining their commitment to the profession. A participant questioned the value of their psychology degree, feeling "indifferent." Another expressed uncertainty about her career path, stating that after two and a half years of graduate school, her main aspiration was simply to "work."

Life-work Conflict

Several students, particularly those who were married with children, reported experiencing significant life-work conflict. Participant 1 illustrated this, stating, "Sometimes we have important family gatherings, and I had schoolwork. I skipped attending some family events, which put me in trouble with my family." Other participants expressed frustration that employer demands did not accommodate their status as students. They reported being consistently required to perform their job duties regardless of their academic workload. Participant 2 complained, "I was

employed and was not given any time-off from work. It was difficult.” Participant 7 elaborated, explaining that “[my] organization expected us to grow professionally but did not relieve us from work. This made it [studying] even more difficult.” Conversely, Participant 10 noted, “If my school was not supportive, I would not have graduated.” Participant 11 initially did not experience life-work conflict during her first year. However, during her second year, she resorted to staying away from home for weeks solely to focus on her thesis. She explained, “I sometimes locked myself at the dorms for weeks because I know if I go back home, I would not be able to write my thesis.”

Support of Social Networks

A significant theme that emerged consistently was the crucial influence of supervisory relationships and peer support in mitigating burnout. Numerous graduates emphasized that a supportive advisor relationship alleviated feelings of isolation and stress. As Participant 6 stated, “...because of professors' support, it was like therapy sessions during classes.” Those who reported having robust mentoring and peer networks tended to demonstrate greater resilience and a more optimistic outlook concerning their professional futures. Participant 4 elaborated, “[my advisor] supported me psychologically. He gave me a mini plan to help me.” Other participants believed that peer support was integral to their academic success. Participant 1 noted, “My peers helped me through it a lot. We met half an hour before each class in a cafe or the library or other places on campus.” Furthermore, Participant 9 expressed, “for me, sometimes social support was more important than motivation. When supported, I get motivated to study.” Conversely, Participant 11 shared that she rarely confided in someone else about academic difficulties but ensured she visited her professor for motivation.

Motivation

Motivation (mainly intrinsic) slowly emerged as an important factor in all the interviews. “I felt so proud I was able to overcome difficulties. This stage [studying] made me stronger and the person I am today,” participant 6 stressed. In a similar vein, participant 7 believed that a good amount of stress was helpful, “for real... Sometimes stress was good. I discovered that the stress of graduate school made me more productive at work.” Others were consistently motivated because they knew what to do with their degrees post-graduation. As participant 1 shared, “post-graduation, I have developed strong motivation. I have given a lot of workshops to teachers in statistical analysis.”

On the contrary, some participants shared feeling demotivated to the extent they had trouble completing their schoolwork. “Sometimes, I don't have the energy to write my thesis or read through or add any new studies,” participant 3 complained. Participant 11 added that unless a student was internally motivated, they would not be able to meet deadlines. “I studied because I loved being a

student. If I were not that motivated, I would have dropped out of school,” she shared.

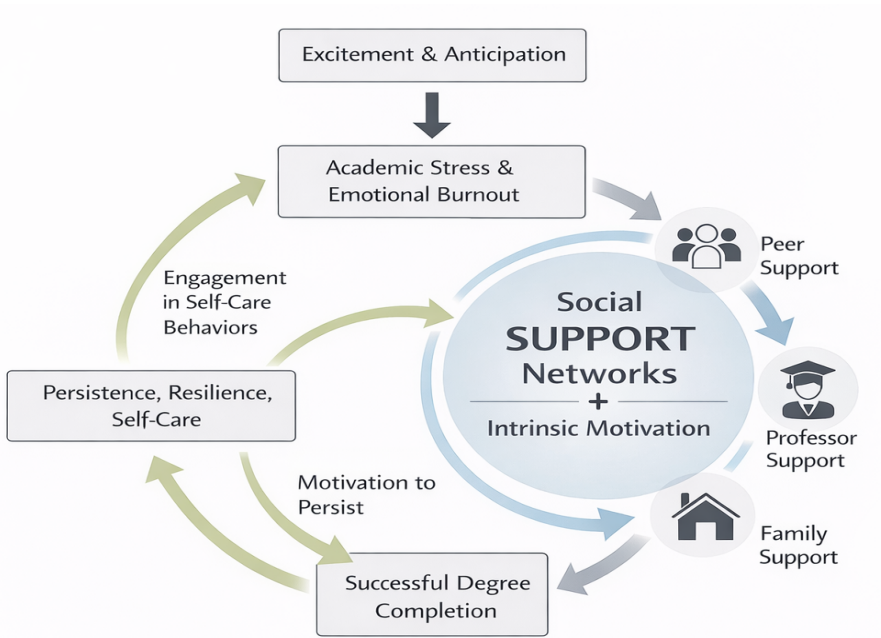
Self-care and Stress Reduction

Several participants explained that self-care was helpful in stress reduction. As participant 2 explained, “I had to allot time every weekend for relaxation to reduce stress.” Participant 4 provided more specific techniques for stress reduction. “I used some techniques to reduce my stress such as relaxation, exercise, and crying,” she elaborated. Narratives of persistent stress were repeated throughout the interviews, especially discussions about end of semesters or thesis writing. “It is good that one reminds herself of self-care. must set time for yourself to relax” participant 6 added. Participant 11 shared that time management was a self-care strategy. “When I am organized, I have time for other things, especially for family and friends,” she added.

Resulting Theoretical Model

To further clarify the relationship between burnout dimensions and success factors in psychology graduate school, Figure 2 illustrates the process dynamics captured in the interviews.

Figure 2: *Illustration of the Process of Burnout and Interaction with Other Factors*



The theoretical model presented above suggests a gradual transition from initial student excitement and motivation in the study of psychology may lead to emotional burnout, primarily attributed to the persistent presence of high academic stress throughout the program. The two principal variables mitigating the influence of burnout and stress might be social support networks and, to a lesser extent, intrinsic motivation. Social support may appear to hold greater significance than motivation, occasionally serving as a catalyst for motivation itself. Recent mediation studies demonstrate that intrinsic motivation and a sense of belonging substantially mediate the relationship between perceived social support and academic persistence, and that sense of belonging accounts for 21% of the variance in students' academic persistence (Mtshweni, 2024). These findings might corroborate the thematic relationships identified in our analysis. Sense of belonging is a natural outcome of on-campus social support, which might explain the significant role of social support in student resilience and success.

Self-care and resilience also demonstrated a modest positive association, assisting students in the management of daily challenges and elevated distress. This non-linear, cyclical process indicates that factors such as self-care and persistence are mediated by social support, motivation, and stress levels. Students who receive social support and possess higher motivation exhibit an increased propensity to engage in self-care, enhance study habits and time management skills, and cognitively reappraise burnout (Folkman et al., 1986; Smith & Ellsworth, 1985).

Summary of Key Findings

Qualitative analysis of 11 interviews established a strong link between psychological burnout support networks, motivation, work-life conflict, self-care, and resilience (See Fig. 2). Social support and intrinsic motivation functioned as mitigating factors, counterbalancing the impact of academic workload. Crucially, supportive supervisory and peer relationships were found to moderate this relationship (Jahnke, Fries & Gänser, 2012), with participants consistently identifying supportive networks as instrumental in preventing burnout and maintaining motivation (Cornér, Löfström, & Pyhältö, 2017). These findings provide empirical grounding for the complexities of burnout within graduate psychology education.

These experiences are consistent with components of burnout theory (Maslach & Pines, 1977). The theory emphasizes believes that sustained stress on emotional well-being leads to emotional exhaustion, which might generate psychological strain. Our findings showed burnout in three interconnected feelings: reduced sense of accomplishment, depersonalization (cynicism), and emotional exhaustion, all of which were advanced by burnout theory. Many students may experience psychological detachment and work on, assuming that conditions will improve. However, by the thesis writing stage, burnout likely

intensifies and manifests as a profound depletion of emotional energy and an inability to maintain concern (Liu et al., 2019). Stated differently, burnout arises when prolonged emotional demands compel individuals to adopt psychological distancing mechanisms that progressively diminish empathy, culminating in emotional exhaustion and disengagement (Maslach & Pines, 1977).

High motivation and consistent social support—from family, peers, and faculty—are essential for students to overcome burnout, as suggested by our theoretical model. Students indicated that refocusing on program goals and seeking assistance from professors, even when feeling unproductive, were key to their success. Specifically, students utilized effective coping mechanisms such as professor guidance, self-care (including relaxation and social activities), and peer study groups. This blending of social support and intrinsic motivation effectively mitigated burnout and maintained their sense of accomplishment (Kim et al., 2018; Jahnke et al., 2012).

Furthermore, the responsibility extends to program faculty, who should not only provide academic mentorship but also integrate essential emotional support into their roles. This holistic system, encompassing pre-admission screening, a cooperative culture, robust peer support, and integrated faculty assistance, can be a way to ensure students' emotional well-being and maximize their potential for career success.

In contrast to previous research focusing on isolated relationships (e.g., social support and motivation, motivation and persistence, or burnout and performance), this model distinctively synthesizes social support, intrinsic motivation, burnout, persistence, and self-care. This holistic methodology may facilitate further empirical investigation and prompt stakeholders to address the determinants contributing to student burnout reduction.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this qualitative study underscore the complex and multifactorial nature of burnout among psychology graduate students. Graduates reporting elevated levels of emotional exhaustion frequently articulated demotivation (El-Sayed et al., 2024), which aligns with previous scholarly literature linking burnout to career dissatisfaction. Most of the participants in this study were not primarily pursuing career advancement but rather sought a psychology degree to fulfill personal objectives. Consequently, graduate programs should actively support their students' career development by establishing explicit expectations regarding stress management and the importance of self-care (Myers et al., 2012).

It may also be requisite for students to formulate a comprehensive post-graduation career plan during the program to enhance their perception of value and clarity concerning their professional trajectory. Allowing students to navigate these matters independently may present a risk, particularly if they lack requisite

methodologies for the professional marketing of their career competencies. Programs should incorporate the creation of long-term career plans alongside academic tasks, thereby enabling students to manage burnout more effectively with the assurance of an impending career path.

Institutions should view graduate student burnout not just as a workload symptom but as a barrier to career success. Proactive steps—like better supervisor training, peer support, and debriefing—can mitigate burnout and boost long-term career commitment (El-Sayed et al., 2024). Additionally, assessing candidates' PsyCap and motivation before enrollment may help ensure sustained motivation and self-care awareness, enabling timely graduation (Colman et al., 2016).

Implications for Burnout and Student Mental Health

Emotional exhaustion appears to stem from insufficient social support and diminished intrinsic motivation. The lack of adequate stress management skills and essential resources, particularly family support, seems to intensify psychological pressure irrespective of the actual academic load (Kim et al., 2018). Our findings suggest that social support alone might be insufficient; intrinsically motivated students seem more likely to persist and achieve timely graduation (Rigg, Day & Adler, 2013). This notion relates to the construct of psychological capital (PsyCap), which encompasses Hope, Efficacy, Resilience, and Optimism (HERO) (Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017). A high level of PsyCap presumably enables individuals to confront adversity with greater confidence, whereas low PsyCap may potentially decrease the probability of successful graduation (Schloemer & Deeg, 2026). Social support could plausibly assist students by enhancing their PsyCap as they navigate academic and personal challenges (Luthans, Luthans & Avey, 2014).

A lack of adequate mental health support might constitute a major concern, as it could potentially exacerbate stress and may lead to issues such as demotivation and depersonalization (Rehman, et al., 2020). Therefore, a primary responsibility of graduate programs should be to proactively enhance mental health support, cultivate supportive environments, boost student resilience, and increase career motivation (El-Sayed et al., 2024). Strategies focusing on mental health support, including but not limited to robust peer support systems, stress-management curricula, and reflective practices, alongside supervisor training, may improve student well-being and reduce the attrition rate within the psychology profession (Allen et al., 2022).

IMPLICATIONS

The findings offer practical recommendations for graduate programs to mitigate burnout and promote sustained career satisfaction.

Enhanced Supervisor Training

Enhanced supervisor training is crucial. Training advisors to identify early burnout signs and employ supportive mentoring, including regular communication, timely feedback, and emotionally supportive relationships, is necessary. Interpersonal justice from supervisors significantly reduces burnout risk (Johnson et al., 2023), and that supervision should extend beyond academics to address social or personal struggles that may impede student success (Harris et al., 2026; Cornér, Löfström & Pyhältö, 2017).

Enhanced Peer Support Systems

Formal peer support, such as mentoring and support groups, allows students to share experiences and coping strategies, offering mutual encouragement. This support buffers against emotional exhaustion and sustains professional commitment (Jahanaray, Pasha, & Jahanaray, 2026; Yin, Zheng, & Li, 2023). Peer support is pivotal for success, particularly for women who can normalize struggles (Remarker et al., 2021). These findings align with the Job Demands–Resources framework and the role of social support, emphasizing the role of relational resources in reducing burnout and aiding persistence (Gleason et al., 2020).

Teaching Stress Management Skills

Incorporating modules on self-care, stress management, self-regulated learning and realistic career planning into the curriculum can help students anticipate and manage burnout (Ali, 2026; Baissane & Zaid, 2025; Coleman et al., 2016). Awareness of emotional demands and the capacity to regulate them effectively are critical in preventing emotional exhaustion (Yang, Liu, & Huang, 2022). Students who have mental health literacy may be more capable of managing stress (Myers et al., 2012), thus decreasing the influence of burnout on student success. Interventions targeting the improvement of academic resilience might make a difference for those students who experience burnout as this might help them recover and regain their passion and academic abilities (Khalaf, 2014).

Reflective Practice

Regular individual or group debriefing sessions allow students to process emotionally taxing experiences. Structured reflective activities, such as guided journaling, assist students in reconciling personal goals with professional demands, thereby enhancing resilience and well-being. As a form of metacognitive strategies, personal wellbeing should be embedded within graduate training to create a culture of resilience and professionals who can help themselves through personal self-care (Ali, 2026; Lim et al., 2026). Students who can manage

themselves emotionally and psychologically may be better prepared for graduate school stress (Ali, 2026).

Training Students in Mental Health Literacy

While stress resilience and self-compassion training show promise, adaptation for psychology programs is needed (Richardson, Trusty, & George, 2020; Sanders et al., 2025). Programs with clinical training and thesis requirements are highly stressful and can result in vicarious traumas (Baker, 2012). Vicarious traumatization can exacerbate school-related burnout, and interventions that improve students' coping skills are likely to reduce stress and strengthen resilience (Coleman et al., 2016). Self-compassion and mental health literacy could help students navigate stress effectively (Liu & Wang, 2026). When students have self-compassion, they may be better able to frame stress within the schoolwork context and mitigate its influence on their overall mental health.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Certain limitations must be acknowledged. First, a sample of 11 participants, although adequate for in-depth qualitative analysis, may not capture the full heterogeneity of experiences across different institutions and specialties. Future research should consider larger and more diverse samples to validate and refine the proposed conceptual model.

Second, the retrospective nature of the interviews may introduce recall bias. Participants' reported experiences might be influenced by their current perceptions and post-graduation outcomes. Longitudinal studies that follow students throughout their graduate training could provide a more dynamic picture of how burnout evolves over time. Burnout could be related to momentary or related to variables that have no impact at the time of the interview such as financial and familial burdens (Richardson, Trusty & George, 2020).

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Longitudinal designs may be necessitated to investigate the evolution of burnout across training stages and into early professional practice, potentially identifying critical inflection points in career development (Jiang et al., 2025). Program evaluation research is warranted to assess the efficacy of targeted interventions, such as enhanced supervisor training or ways to build structured support systems early on.

Further investigations should extend beyond psychology to explore burnout across academic disciplines and cultural contexts. Given that cultural belief systems have been shown to moderate the stress-well-being relationship (Chou et al., 2014), a comprehensive understanding of burnout may require consideration

of cultural values. Research ought to probe the underlying mediators and moderators of the burnout process. For instance, while social support is often implicated in sustaining motivation (Rehman et al., 2020), the differential relevance of peer versus faculty/family support merits greater attention. Focusing on such mechanisms may prove instrumental in refining effective interventions before emotional exhaustion manifests in graduate students.

REFERENCES

- Ali, S. M. (2026). Metacognitive strategies in education: Fostering self-regulated learning across disciplines and learning environments. *Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in Education*, 15(1), 45-72. <https://doi.org/10.32674/3hd5e589>
- Al Omari, O., Valsaraj, B. P., Khatatbeh, M., Al-Jubouri, M. B., Emam, M., Al Hashmi, I., Al Qadire, M., Aljezawi, M., ALBashtawy, M., Alkhawaldeh, A., Hasona, A. A., Tarhini, Z., Damra, J., Al Sabei, S., & Mohamed, N. (2023). Self and public stigma towards mental illnesses and its predictors among university students in 11 Arabic-speaking countries: A multi-site study. *International Journal of Mental Health Nursing*, 32(6), 1745–1755. <https://doi.org/10.1111/inm.13206>
- Nkrumah, S. O., Adu, M. K., Agyapong, B., Da Luz Dias, R., & Agyapong, V. I. O. (2025). Prevalence and correlates of depression, anxiety, and burnout among physicians and postgraduate medical trainees: a scoping review of recent literature. *Frontiers in Public Health*, 13, 1537108. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2025.1537108>
- Allen, H. K., Barrall, A. L., Vincent, K. B., & Arria, A. M. (2021). Stress and burnout among graduate students: Moderation by sleep duration and quality. *International Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, 28(1), 21-28. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12529-020-09867-8>
- Allen, H. K., Lilly, F., Green, K. M., Zanjani, F., Vincent, K. B., & Arria, A. M. (2022). Graduate student burnout: substance use, mental health, and the moderating role of advisor satisfaction. *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*, 20(2), 1130-1146. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11469-020-00431-9>
- Appleseth, H. S., LaCaille, L. J., LaCaille, R. A., Hessler, E. E., & Liang, J. O. (2024). Changes in basic psychological needs, passion, and well-being of first-semester graduate students. *Journal of American College Health*, 72(9), 3612-3620. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07448481.2023.2186128>
- Baissane, O., & Zaid, H. (2025). Bridging the gap: Exploring self-regulated learning and academic achievement in Moroccan higher education. *Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in Education*, 14(4), 139-152. <https://doi.org/10.32674/kmf9bx98>

- Baker, A. (2012). Training the resilient psychotherapist: What graduate students need to know about vicarious traumatization. *Journal of Social, Behavioral, and Health Sciences*, 6(1), 1-12.
<https://doi.org/10.5590/JSBHS.2012.06.1.01>
- Balakrishnan, B., Krishnan Muthaiah, V. P., Peters-Brinkerhoff, C., & Ganesan, M. (2023). Stress, anxiety, and depression in professional graduate students during COVID 19 pandemic. *The Educational and Developmental Psychologist*, 40(2), 201–213.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/20590776.2022.2114341>
- Braun, S. E., Mladen, S., Crawford, M., Edwards, S., & Kinser, P. (2023). A constructivist Grounded Theory Exploration of Mindfulness for Healthcare Professional Students. *Complementary Therapies in Clinical Practice*, 50, 101689. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ctcp.2022.101689>
- Butler, L. D., Carello, J., & Maguin, E. (2017). Trauma, stress, and self-care in clinical training: Predictors of burnout, decline in health status, secondary traumatic stress symptoms, and compassion satisfaction. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice and Policy*, 9(4), 416–424. <https://doi.org/10.1037/tra0000187>
- Cardoso, M., Nobre, M., & Santo, P. (2025). A phenomenological approach to female experiences in academic postgraduate settings in northern Brazil: Gender asymmetries and disparities. *Women S Studies International Forum*, 110, 103068. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2025.103068>
- Charmaz, K. (2008). Grounded theory as an emergent method. In S. N. Hesse-Biber & P. Leavy (Eds.), *Handbook of Emergent Methods* (pp. 155–170). The Guilford Press.
- Charmaz, K. (2014). Grounded Theory in Global Perspective: Reviews by International Researchers. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 20(9), 1074-1084.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800414545235>
- Charmaz, K., & Belgrave, L. L. (2017). Grounded theory. *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology*, 1–6. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781405165518.wbeosg070.pub2>
- Chiriac, H. E., Forsberg, C., & Thornberg, R. (2023). Teachers' perspectives on factors influencing the school climate: A constructivist grounded theory case study. *Cogent Education*, 10(2).
<https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2023.2245171>
- Chou, L. F., Wang, A. C., Wang, T. Y., Huang, M. P., & Cheng, B. S. (2014). Work stress and employee well-being: The critical role of Zhong-Yong beliefs. *Asian Journal of Social Psychology*, 17(1), 30–43.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/ajsp.12055>

- Colman, D. E., Echon, R., Lemay, M. S., McDonald, J., Smith, K. R., Spencer, J., & Swift, J. K. (2016). The efficacy of self-care for graduate students in professional psychology: A meta-analysis. *Training and Education in Professional Psychology, 10*(4), 188–197. <https://doi.org/10.1037/tep0000130>
- Cornér, S., Löfström, E., & Pyhältö, K. (2017). The relationships between doctoral students' perceptions of supervision and burnout. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies, 12*, 91–106. <https://doi.org/10.28945/3754>
- Dalderop, K. (2024). Investigating language learning strategy use in adult L2 literacy: A constructivist grounded theory. *AILA Review, 37*(2), 334–359. <https://doi.org/10.1075/aila.24017.dal>
- Danziger, K. (2013). Psychology and its history. *Theory & Psychology, 23*(6), 829–839. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0959354313497056>
- El-Ghoroury, N. H., Galper, D. I., Sawaqdeh, A., & Bufka, L. F. (2012). Stress, coping, and barriers to wellness among psychology graduate students. *Training and Education in Professional Psychology, 6*(2), 122–134. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0028768>
- El-Sayed, M. M., Taha, S. M., AbdElhay, E. S., & Hawash, M. M. (2024). Understanding the relationship of academic motivation and social support in graduate nursing education in Egypt. *BMC nursing, 23*(1), 12. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12912-023-01671-5>
- Folkman, S., Lazarus, R. S., Dunkel-Schetter, C., DeLongis, A., & Gruen, R. J. (1986). Dynamics of a stressful encounter: cognitive appraisal, coping, and encounter outcomes. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 50*(5), 992–1003. <https://psycnet.apa.org/buy/1986-21910-001>
- Frazier, M., Lin, Q., Lee, G. A., & Xie, K. (2025). From space to place: A Visual Grounded Theory analysis of how college students shape study environments. *Learning in Context, 2*(1-2). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lecon.2025.100016>
- Freudenberger, H. J. (1974). Staff Burn-Out. *Journal of Social Issues, 30*(1), 159–165. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.1974.tb00706.x>
- Gleason, F., Malone, E., Wood, L., Baker, S. J., Hollis, R. H., Richman, J. S., Chu, D. I., & Lindeman, B. (2020). The job demands-resources model as a framework to identify factors associated with burnout in surgical residents. *The Journal of Surgical Research, 247*, 121–127. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jss.2019.10.034>
- Gaudreau, P., & Benoit, A. (2025). Perfectionism and excellencism in graduate students: Contrasting links with performance satisfaction, research self-efficacy, burnout, and dropout intentions. *British Journal of Psychology, 116*(2), 456–474. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjop.12798>

- Harris, S. C., Smits, E., McGinity, R., & Zeeman, J. M. (2026). Assessing factors that influence perceived burnout in postdoctoral fellows and identifying recommendations to support their well-being. *Plos One*, *21*(3), e0344974. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0344974>
- Harvey, G., El Hussein, M. T., & Carter-Snell, C. (2024). Pushing through: A grounded theory of undergraduate nursing students making meaning of clinical-related critical incidents. *Journal of Professional Nursing*, *55*, 32–39. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.profnurs.2024.08.011>
- Hazell, C. M., Niven, J. E., Chapman, L., Roberts, P. E., Cartwright-Hatton, S., Valeix, S., & Berry, C. (2021). Nationwide assessment of the mental health of UK doctoral researchers. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, *8*. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-021-00983-8>
- He, L., Li, W., Zhang, Y., Wang, J., Yu, Y., Li, S., Liu, B., & Tian, J. (2025). Academic stress and online learning engagement in medical students: the parallel mediating roles of sleep quality and positive academic emotions. *BMC Medical Education*, *26*(1), 54. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12909-025-08369-z>
- Heckler, D. R., Monnat, L. M., Reino, C., Miller, T., & Rea, S. D. (2025). Cultivating diversity in the field of psychology: Understanding challenges and opportunities through focus groups with underrepresented undergraduate students. *Training and Education in Professional Psychology*, *19*(4), 299–313. <https://doi.org/10.1037/tep0000520>
- Hudson, S. A., & O'Regan, J. (1994). Stress and the graduate psychology student. *Journal of clinical psychology*, *50*(6), 973–977. [https://doi.org/10.1002/1097-4679\(199411\)50:6%3C973::AID-JCLP2270500623%3E3.0.CO;2-Q](https://doi.org/10.1002/1097-4679(199411)50:6%3C973::AID-JCLP2270500623%3E3.0.CO;2-Q)
- Jabbarov, R. B., Valiyeva, S., Poladov, D., Nasibova, U., & Karimli, N. (2023). Manifestations of emotional exhaustion in psychology students. *Apuntes Universitarios*, *13*(4), 1479. <https://doi.org/10.17162/au.v13i4.1479>
- Jahanaray, M., Pasha, A., & Jahanaray, A. (2026). Burnout and psychological distress across U.S. postgraduate trainees, fellows, and students: A comprehensive meta-analysis. *Journal of American College Health*, 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07448481.2025.2611276>
- Jahnke, S., Fries, S., & Gänser, H. (2012). Social support, workload, and burnout among graduate students: The mediating role of engagement. *Journal of College Student Development*, *53*(6), 844–860. <https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2012.0081>
- Jiang, W., Yang, Y., & Tan, T. Q. (2025). The role of self-control in fatigue: A longitudinal study across a semester. *Asian Journal of Social Psychology*, *28*(3), 345–357. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajsp.70035>

- Johnson, W. B., Long, S., Smith, D. G., & Griffin, K. A. (2023). Creating a mentoring culture in graduate training programs. *Training and Education in Professional Psychology, 17*(1), 63–70. <https://doi.org/10.1037/tep0000404>
- Khalaf, M. A. (2014). Validity and reliability of the academic resilience scale in Egyptian context. *US-China Education Review B, 4*(3), 202–210. DOI: 10.17265/2161-6248/2014.03B.006
- Khoury, B., & De Castro Pecanha, V. (2023). Transforming psychology education to include global mental health. *Cambridge Prisms: Global Mental Health, 10*, e17. <https://doi.org/10.1017/gmh.2023.11>
- Kim, B., Jee, S., Lee, J., An, S., & Lee, S. M. (2018). Relationships between social support and student burnout: A meta-analytic approach. *Stress and Health, 34*(1), 127–134. <https://doi.org/10.1002/smi.2771>
- Klein, A. B., Barnes Horowitz, N. M., Tran, I., Rabasco, A., Steele, E. H., & Breaux, R. (2023). Perceived barriers to seeking mental health treatment among clinical psychology graduate students. *Training and Education in Professional Psychology, 17*(2), 208–212. <https://doi.org/10.1037/tep0000413>
- Kourea, L., Papanastasiou, E., Diaconescu, S., & Popa-Velea, O. (2023). Academic burnout in psychology and health-allied sciences: The BENDiT-EU program. *Frontiers in Psychology, 14*. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1239001>
- Kovach Clark, H., Murdock, N. L., & Koetting, K. (2009). Predicting burnout and career choice satisfaction in counseling psychology graduate students. *The Counseling Psychologist, 37*(4), 580-606. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011000008319985>
- Lim, J. T. Y., Lee, K. H., Siw, M. H., Khansa, F. D., Lee, F. A. M. F. R., Woon, L. S. C., & Saini, S. M. (2026). Burnout in medical students and its psychological correlates with mentorship, motivation and professional values. *Frontiers in Medicine, 13*, 1752508. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fmed.2026.1752508>
- Liu, X., & Wang, Y. (2026). Academic burnout and depression among college students: Self-compassion as a mediator and perceived social support as a moderator. *Current Psychology: A Journal for Diverse Perspectives on Diverse Psychological Issues, 45*(3). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-025-08999-y>
- Liu, C., Wang, L., Qi, R., Wang, W., Jia, S., Shang, D., ... Zhao, Y. (2019). Prevalence and associated factors of depression and anxiety among doctoral students: The mediating effect of mentoring relationships on the association between research self-efficacy and depression/anxiety. *Psychology Research and Behavior Management, 12*, 195–208. <https://doi.org/10.2147/PRBM.S195131>

- Luthans, F., & Youssef-Morgan, C. M. (2017). Psychological capital: An evidence-based positive approach. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, 4, 339-366.
<https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-032516-113324>
- Luthans, B. C., Luthans, K. W., & Avey, J. B. (2014). Building the leaders of tomorrow: The development of academic psychological capital. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, 21(2), 191-199.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1548051813517003>
- Mahamid, F., Hafshejani, S. S., Dinani, M. M., Bokhan, N., Chou, P., Bdier, D., ... Zangeneh, M. (2025). Covid-19 anxiety predicts burnout among university students: The mediating roles of hope, adaptability, and anti-mattering. *Journal of Ethnicity in Substance Abuse*, 1–19.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/15332640.2025.2507429>
- Maslach, C., & Pines, A. (1977). The burn-out syndrome in the day care setting. *Childcare Quarterly*, 6(2), 100-113.
- Miller, C., Postill, B., & Andrews, J. J. W. (2023). Self-Care of Canadian School Psychology Graduate Students. *Canadian Journal of School Psychology*, 38(4), 349-372.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/08295735231183463>
- Mills, J., Bonner, A., & Francis, K. (2006). The Development of Constructivist Grounded Theory. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 5(1), 25-35. <https://doi.org/10.1177/160940690600500103>
- Moss, R. A., Gorczyński, P., Sims-Schouten, W., Heard-Laureote, K., & Creaton, J. (2022). Mental health and wellbeing of postgraduate researchers: exploring the relationship between mental health literacy, help-seeking behavior, psychological distress, and wellbeing. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 41(4), 1168–1183.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2021.1906210>
- Mtshweni, B. V. (2024). Perceived social support and academic persistence among undergraduate students: Mediation of sense of belonging and intrinsic motivation. *Journal of Psychology in Africa*, 34(1), 36–43.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14330237.2024.2314366>
- Myers, S. B., Sweeney, A. C., Popick, V., Wesley, K., Bordfeld, A., & Fingerhut, R. (2012). Self-care practices and perceived stress levels among psychology graduate students. *Training and Education in Professional Psychology*, 6(1), 55–66. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0026534>
- Negash, A., Khan, M. A., Medhin, G., Wondimagegn, D., & Araya, M. (2020). Mental distress, perceived need, and barriers to receiving professional mental health care among university students in Ethiopia. *BMC Psychiatry*, 20. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12888-020-02602-3>

- Olson, N., Oberhoffer-Fritz, R., Reiner, B., & Schulz, T. (2025). Stress, student burnout and study engagement – a cross-sectional comparison of university students of different academic subjects. *BMC Psychology*, 13. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-025-02602-6>
- Peluso, D. L., Carleton, R. N., & Asmundson, G. J. (2011). Depression symptoms in Canadian psychology graduate students: Do research productivity, funding, and the academic advisory relationship play a role? *Canadian Journal of Behavioral Science*, 43(2), 119. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0022624>
- Pirelli, G., Formon, D. L., & Maloney, K. (2020). Preventing vicarious trauma (VT), compassion fatigue (CF), and burnout (BO) in forensic mental health: Forensic psychology as exemplar. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 51(5), 454. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pro0000293>
- Rehman, A. U., Bhuttah, T. M., & You, X. (2020). Linking burnout to psychological well-being: The mediating role of social support and learning motivation. *Psychology Research and Behavior Management*, 545-554. <https://doi.org/10.2147/PRBM.S250961>
- Remaker, D. N., Gonzalez, M. M., Houston-Armstrong, T., & Sprague-Connors, G. (2021). Women of color and mentorship in graduate training. *Training and Education in Professional Psychology*, 15(1), 70–75. <https://doi.org/10.1037/tep0000297>
- Richardson, C. M., Trusty, W. T., & George, K. A. (2020). Trainee wellness: Self-critical perfectionism, self-compassion, depression, and burnout among doctoral trainees in psychology. *Counselling Psychology Quarterly*, 33(2), 187-198. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09515070.2018.1509839>
- Rico, Y., & Bunge, E. L. (2021). Stress and burnout in psychology doctoral students. *Psychology, Health & Medicine*, 26(2), 177-183. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13548506.2020.1842471>
- Rigg, J., Day, J., & Adler, H. (2013). Emotional exhaustion in graduate students: The role of engagement, self-efficacy and social support. *Journal of Educational and Developmental Psychology*, 3(2), 138. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/jedp.v3n2p138>
- Remojo, J. A. B., & Cacho, R. (2026). Balancing acts: Navigating school, work, and life among female pre-service teachers in the Philippines. *Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in Education*, 15(1), 73-94. <https://doi.org/10.32674/9j37bh77>
- Rummell, C. M. (2015). An exploratory study of psychology graduate student workload, health, and program satisfaction. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 46(6). <https://doi.org/10.1037/pro0000056>

- Sanders, L., Budd, G., Carter, L., Dave, U., & Kemp, A. H. (2025). Enhanced Stress-Resilience Training (ESRT) for graduate-entry medical students: A randomised-controlled, mixed-method investigation. *BMC Medical Education, 25*, 7768. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12909-025-07768-6>
- Schloemer, H., & Deeg, M. D. (2026). Combating Student Burnout with Internal Resources: The Effects of Psychological Capital and Perceived Social Support. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, <https://doi.org/10.1177/15210251251408352>
- Schwarz, J., & Cooper, J. M. (2025). Wellness as an Ethical Mandate: Examining the Mental Health, Stress, and Self-Care Practices of School Psychology Graduate Students. *School Psychology Review, 54*(6), 767–784. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2372966X.2024.2396271>
- Simões, C., Costa, A., Morais, C., & Gomes, A. R. (2022). Adaptation to stress in psychology graduate students. In *Occupational and Environmental Safety and Health IV (pp. 317-331)*. Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- Smith, C. A., & Ellsworth, P. C. (1985). Patterns of cognitive appraisal in emotion. *Journal of personality and social psychology, 48*(4), 813.
- Swords, B. A., & Ellis, M. V. (2017). Burnout and vigor among health service psychology doctoral students. *The Counseling Psychologist, 45*(8), 1141-1161. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011000017747548>
- Tiêt, Q. Q., Brooks, J., & Patton, C. (2024). Risk factors of PTSD and substance use disorders in clinical and counseling psychology doctoral students. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/tra0001803>
- Ting, C., Cheng, L., & Zhang, Z. (2023). Global prevalence and trend of anxiety among graduate students: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Brain and Behavior, 13*(4). <https://doi.org/10.1002/brb3.2909>
- Toussaint, A., Patel, A., Patel, N., & Graber, C. (2025). How we integrated a psychiatrist into graduate medical education to support resident mental health. *Journal of Surgical Education, 82*(4), 1053–1060. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsurg.2025.06.005>
- White, N., Milicev, J., Bradford, D. R. R., Rodger, A., & Gardani, M. (2024). The mental labyrinth of postgraduate research: A qualitative study of postgraduate mental health and wellbeing and the impact of the supervisory relationship. *Higher Education, 87*, 1211–1226. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-023-01061-5>
- Wilkins-Yel, K. G., Delaney, T., Gamio Cuervo, Á., Zounlome, N. O. O., & Sparks, P. D. (2024). Examining how graduate advisors mitigate or exacerbate the structural barriers Women of Color navigate in STEM doctoral programs. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education, 17*(5), 719–733. <https://doi.org/10.1037/dhe0000452>

- Woolston, C. (2019). PhD poll reveals fear and joy, contentment and anguish. *Nature*, 575, 403–406. <https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-019-03459-7>
- Wu, F. L., Yang, Q., Jiang, J., Yu, J., & Jin, Y. C. (2025). Targeted exercise interventions on stress, anxiety, depression, and sleep disorders in PhD students. *World Journal of Psychiatry*, 15(12). <https://doi.org/10.5498/wjp.v15.i12.109558>
- Xie, S., Yu, S., & Xu, L. (2026). Supervisor–group culture, age and the stress–burnout mechanism: a qualitative study of Chinese doctoral students. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 17, 1794711. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2026.1794711>
- Yang, K., Liu, X., & Huang, H. (2022). Emotional dissonance and burnout: Exploring mechanisms in emotional labor. *Asian Journal of Social Psychology*, 25(2), 122–133. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajsp.12530>
- Yin, Y., Zheng, X., & Li, N. (2023). Emotional labor strategies and job burnout: A meta-analysis. *Asian Journal of Social Psychology*, 26(4), 342–356. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajsp.12554>
- Zhai, Y., & Prescod, D. J. (2025). Promoting multicultural and social justice counselling competency of international counselling students. *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research*, 25(1). <https://doi.org/10.1002/capr.12803>
- Zhai, Y., Almaawali, M., & Bannish, L. (2023). Mental well-being, academic experience, and dropout intention among counseling students affected by the shift to online instruction during the covid-19 pandemic. *Journal of Technology in Counselor Education and Supervision*, 3(2). <https://doi.org/10.61888/2692-4129.1054>

DECLARATION

Ethical Approval

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Institutional Review Board at Sultan Qaboos University (REAAF/EDU/PSYCHOLOGY/2024/07). All participants provided informed consent prior to participation.

Data Availability

Data is available upon a reasonable request.

Conflict of Interest

All authors report no conflict of interest.

Funding

This study received funding from Sultan Qaboos University.

Acknowledgment

The authors would like to express their sincere appreciation to all participants who generously shared their experiences and insights, which made this study possible.

AI Use Disclosure

Chat GPT 5.2 model was used to assist in generating illustrative flow charts and a theoretical model.
