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Student stress, burnout and engagement.

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Abstract

The aim of the current study was to determine whether academic burnout/engagement mediated the relationship between academic obstacles/facilitators and academic performance within a South African university context. Participants received a web link to an online survey host in which a questionnaire was presented. The questionnaire included a self-developed demographic questionnaire, an adapted version of the Student Stress Scale (Da Coste Leite & Israel, 2011), an adapted version of the Factors of Academic Facilitators Scale (Salanova, Schaufeli, Martinez, & Breso, 2010), the Maslach Burnout Inventory-Student Scale (Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma, & Bakker, 2002) and the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale-Student (Schaufeli, Salanova, et al., 2002). The final sample (n=351) consisted of both full-time and part-time first year psychology students.

The results of the current study demonstrated that academic obstacles were positively related to academic burnout while academic burnout was negatively related to academic performance. Academic facilitators were also negatively related to academic burnout and positively related to academic engagement. Academic burnout was also found to mediate the relationship between academic obstacles/facilitators and academic performance. The results of the study also demonstrated some non-hypothesised, but not unexpected, findings. Academic burnout, for one, was found to be negatively related to academic engagement. In addition, the indirect effect between academic obstacles and engagement was negative while the indirect effect between academic facilitators and engagement was positive. The results of the current study further demonstrated a novel finding whereby academic performance was positively related to burnout. Furthermore, the indirect effect between academic burnout and engagement was positive while the indirect effects between academic burnout and burnout, academic performance and engagement, and academic performance and performance, were negative. These findings were supported by previous research within both the work and student context.

The results of the current study demonstrated, however, that academic engagement was not significantly related to academic performance and therefore was not a mediator in the relationship between academic obstacles/facilitators and academic performance. These results were unexpected given the literature available, however, may have been due to the way in

which academic performance was operationalised within the current study. The implications of the results and the limitations of the current study were discussed, and suggestions for further research were made.

Key words: Academic burnout; academic engagement; academic obstacles; academic facilitators; academic performance.