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RESEARCH

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Prevention of Burnout in Educational Professionals

Zapobieganie wypaleniu zawodowemu nauczycieli

Introduction

Pursuing an occupation in teaching is associated with a particular level of workload and regular exposure to a number of risk factors. Long-term exposure to these factors can result in burnout. The notion of burnout appeared in psychology and psychotherapy in the 1970s; the term was first used by Hendrich Freudenberger in 1974 (Křivohlavý, 1998). Scientific literature provides a considerable number of various definitions. It can be

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stated, however, that all definitions of burnout feature common aspects, including: negative emotional symptoms, connection with pursuing a specific occupation, symptoms occurring in otherwise mentally healthy individuals, lower performance (lower work efficiency) related to negative attitudes (not to lower competencies, work capacity or skills), and loss of interest in work (Kallwas, 2007; Křivohlavý, 2001; Jankovský, 2003; Jeklová, Reitmayerová, 2006; Stock, 2010). The development of the syndrome is influenced by multiple factors, the exposure to which is usually long-term. Burnout treatment requires a considerable amount of time. Therefore, it is important to prevent burnout, i.e. to find a sufficient number of protective factors, which comprise an effective preventive measure in certain occupations, e.g. education professionals.

Methods

The present study aims to determine which protective factors are considered important for burnout prevention by education professionals. The study used a qualitative method. Thus far, 20 group discussions with selected participant education professionals have taken place.

Selected results

One hundred and sixty education professionals took part in the study, which tracked their sex (Table 1), duration of professional experience (Table 2), level of education (Table 3), and profession (Table 4).

Table 1. Participants by sex

Sex	Number of participants
Female	108 (67.5%)
Male	52 (32.85%)
Total	160 (100%)

Table 2. Participants by duration of professional experience

Duration of professional experience	Number of participants
Less than three years	40 (25.0%)
Three to 10 years	37 (23.1%)
More than 10 years	83 (51.9%)
Total	160 (100%)

Table 3. Participants by level of education

Level of education	Number of participants
Secondary vocational education	16 (10.0%)
Higher vocational education	32 (20.0%)
University education	112 (70.0%)
Total	160 (100%)

Table 4. Participants by profession

Profession	Number of participants
Preschool teacher	27 (16.9%)
Primary school teacher	40 (25.0%)
Middle school teacher	68 (42.5%)
Secondary school teacher or higher	25 (15.6%)
Total	160 (100%)

Table 5. Perceived importance of selected protective factors in burnout prevention

Protective factor	Perceived importance				
	1	2	3	4	5
Social support from close family and friends	0	10	33	40	108
Regular physical activity	6	22	51	55	48
Stress-coping strategies	0	0	4	32	124
Self-efficacy	0	19	101	13	27
Enough sleep	4	7	104	39	6
Affiliative relationships in the workplace	0	0	7	108	26
Education and self-fulfilment	3	29	58	16	54

Table 5 shows how participants evaluate selected burnout protective factors. The selection included seven factors. The participants were able to choose only one value on a scale from one through five to evaluate each factor according to its importance (where 1 = lowest importance, 5 = highest importance).

The preventive factors most often evaluated as important (4) and very important (5) were social support from close family and friends, stress-coping strategies and affiliative relationships in the workplace. None of the participants used a value of 1 or 2 (low or very low importance) in evaluating these factors.

Table 6. Ability to differentiate between work and personal life

Ability to differentiate between work and personal life	Number of participants
Yes	100 (62.5%)
No, I bring work problems home	57 (35.6%)
Other	3 (1.9%)
Total	160 (100%)

Table 6 shows the education professionals' ability to differentiate between work and personal life. One hundred (62.5%) out of 160 participants have this ability. In contrast, 57 (35.6%) respondents admitted that they often deal with work problems in their personal life. The remaining three (1.9%) respondents chose "other," adding that they occasionally bring work problems home and that it could not be avoided.

Table 7. Prestige of teaching professions

Prestige of teaching professions	Number of participants
High prestige	2 (1.2%)
Rather high	14 (8.8%)
Average prestige	85 (53.1%)
Rather low	31 (19.4%)
Low prestige	28 (17.5%)
Total	160 (100%)

In the next question, the participants were required to indicate on a scale from 1 through 5 how, in their opinion, society perceives the prestige of teaching professions. Most answers were between 3 and 5, i.e. average to low prestige (Table 7). More than half of the respondents (53.1%) think that teaching professions have an average prestige in the eyes of society. However, 36.9% respondents believe that society perceives teaching professions as occupations with a lower or low prestige. Approximately one third of the participants complained about hostile attitudes of their students' parents or aggressive behaviour. The discussions show that necessary measures must be taken to boost the prestige of teaching professions in teachers themselves and in society. Unfortunately, this is a long-term process.

Table 8. Adequate opportunities for self-fulfilment at work

Adequate opportunities for self-fulfilment at work	Number of participants
Yes, I have adequate opportunities for self-fulfilment	45 (28.1%)
Partially, I would welcome more opportunities for self-fulfilment	78 (48.8%)
No, I don't have adequate opportunities for self-fulfilment	37 (23.1%)
Total	160 (100%)

Table 8 shows how participants perceive their opportunities for self-fulfilment at work. Most participants, 78 in total (48.8%), believe that their opportunities for self-fulfilment at work are only partially adequate and they would welcome more such opportunities. Thirty-seven (23.1%) education professionals indicated they had no opportunities for self-fulfilment.

Table 9. Occurrence of burnout in the past

Occurrence of burnout in the past	Number of participants
Yes	28 (17.5%)
No	132 (82.8%)
Total	160 (100%)

Table 9 depicts the occurrence of burnout in participants in the past. Twenty-eight (17.5%) out of 160 participants experienced burnout in the past. On the contrary, 132 (82.8%) participants had never suffered from burnout.

Table 10. Feeling at risk of burnout

Feeling at risk of burnout	Number of participants
Yes	30 (18.8%)
No	130 (81.2%)
Total	160 (100%)

Table 10 shows how many education professionals in the sample feel at risk of burnout. Thirty out of 160 respondents (18.8%) are currently feeling at risk of burnout, while the remaining 130 (81.2%) educational professionals do not think that burnout is a threat to their health at the moment.

Discussion and conclusion

As the above study will be completed in December 2019, it is not yet possible to compare the results. The data gathered so far shows that, in terms of prevention, the most important factors for education professionals include social support, stress-coping strategies and affiliative relationships in the workplace that help them deal with a higher workload typical of their occupation. The study also shows that almost one third of the research sample has experienced burnout and that the syndrome correlates with the level of perceived prestige of teaching professions.

Burnout is a frequently mentioned term nowadays, in particular since modern society is characterised by chronic stress and high demands on individuals, which are main causes of the development of this syndrome. To avoid losing human resources, it is necessary to focus on prevention. Therefore, it will be important, as a follow-up to this study, to identify key prevention measures that will help reduce the occurrence of burnout.

It is necessary to teach all education professionals to recognize of possible indicators of burnout. Measures for prevention, minimizing the possibility of burnout, should, of course, be a responsibility for employers (schools). The current situation may be also solved by systematic training of education professionals in the area of social skills, if possible by means of self-experience training. The authors are convinced that if such training is to be efficient, it must be based on learners' own pedagogical experience. Therefore, the core of such training lies in lifelong learning and continuous training programmes for education professionals.

Abstract: This long-term study aims to map protective factors that education professionals deem important for burnout prevention. The research sample includes 160 education professionals for the time being. The study uses a qualitative method (20 group discussions). Due to the size of the sample and continuation of the research, it is not possible to generalise the presented data. However, the authors believe that all signs or symptoms of burnout should be taken very seriously. The situation may be solved by systematic training of education professionals based on the acquisition of social skills by means of self-experience training.

Keywords: burnout, workload, risk and protective factors, educational professional

Streszczenie: Długoterminowe badania mają na celu określenie czynników ochronnych, które nauczyciele/pedagodzy uważają za ważne przy zapobieganiu syndromowi wypalenia zawodowego. Próbę badawczą, w chwili obecnej, stanowi 160 pedagogów/nauczycieli. W badaniach wykorzystano metodę jakościową (20 wywiadów grupowych). Ze względu na wielkość próby i nadal trwające badania ankietowe, prezentowane badanie nie może być uogólnione. Autorzy jednak są zdania/uważają, że należy brać bardzo poważnie wszystkie wskazania czy przejawy zespołu wypalenia zawodowego. Rozwiązaniem może być systematyczne kształcenie nauczycieli, które byłoby oparte na zdobywaniu umiejętności społecznych i doświadczenia poprzez trening.

Słowa kluczowe: zespół wypalenia zawodowego, obciążenie pracą, czynniki ryzyka i ochrony, pedagog/nauczyciel

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