



## Jerzy Gut

PhD, Associate Professor, Andrzej Frycz Modrzewski Krakow University  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6682-864X>

## Kamil Niedziela

Student, Andrzej Frycz Modrzewski Krakow University  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8820-3034>

# The phenomenon of job burnout on the example of police officers in the city of Krakow

## Introduction

Job burnout syndrome is most often defined in the literature as a psychological syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and a reduced sense of personal achievement that can occur in people who work with other people in a certain way.<sup>1</sup> American psychologist Herbert J. Freudenberger, a recognized authority on the diagnosis and treatment of job burnout syndrome, defines it as “[...] an extreme state of exhaustion caused by excessive demands on energy and all resources available to the individual.”<sup>2</sup>

Job burnout syndrome is a set of symptoms arising as a result of emotional and physical overload, which is caused directly by stress occurring in the workplace. Job burnout is a phenomenon whose effects are experienced by an increasing number of

<sup>1</sup> Ch. Maslach, *Wypalenie w perspektywie wielowymiarowej*, [in:] *Wypalenie zawodowe – przyczyny, mechanizmy, zapobieganie*, ed. H. Sęk, PWN, Warszawa 2000, p. 15.

<sup>2</sup> H.J. Freudenberger, *Staff burnout*, “Journal of Social Issues” 1974, vol. 30, p. 159, [as cited in:] *ibidem*, p. 19.

people during their careers. It is fostered by the tremendous pace of life and the increasing demands of employers and social pressures.

The literature talks about three groups of symptoms of job burnout syndrome, that should worry us. These include emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and negative evaluation of one's own abilities.

Emotional exhaustion involves the feeling that our emotional resources have been "used up" and drained of vitality. Increasingly, we feel that we have reached the limits of our endurance and capabilities. We feel chronic fatigue, and the previous standard way of dealing with stress is no longer sufficient.<sup>3</sup>

The second component of job burnout is depersonalization, i.e. the subjective treatment of the people we help and work with. Increasingly distancing ourselves from people only seemingly protects us from strong emotional arousal, but actually leads us to the lack of empathy and treat customers and partners in our work as "intruders" who disturb our apparent inner peace. Thus, excessive distancing from people, can negatively affect the quality of our work.<sup>4</sup>

The third dimension of job burnout is the negative assessment of our own abilities, which comes down to the fact that we are dissatisfied with our professional achievements and competences. This low assessment of one's competence and performance is often related to the previous two dimensions, although sometimes it is a factor more independent of them.

Job burnout usually occurs as a result of prolonged feelings of stress associated with a particular occupation. It is diagnosed both among employees with many years of work experience and among young employees who are just starting their professional career. The fast pace of life, a permanent lack of time, the inability to find a balance between private life and work, excessive work responsibilities and lack of satisfaction with one's profession can lead to the disease of job burnout.

Representatives of various professions are exposed every day to stressful situations that lead to monotony and fatigue, as well as lack of motivation to work. It is recognized that the uniformed services community is at the highest risk of both emotional and physical exhaustion, due to the mode and manner of work they perform each day. Previous studies have shown that among the high-risk occupations in the context of burnout is the police service.<sup>5</sup>

The police profession involves involvement in high-risk situations that require a willingness to take various risks. Police officers constantly deal with situations of violence and with aggressive and unlawful behavior that threaten their sense

---

<sup>3</sup> A. Wielgus, J. Tomaszewski, *Wypalenie zawodowe*, Wydawnictwo M, Kraków 2013, p. 11.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 11–12.

<sup>5</sup> P. Stawiarska, *Wypalenie zawodowe w perspektywie wyzwań współczesnego świata*, Difin, Warszawa 2016, pp. 71.

of security, posing a threat to their health and life. It should also be noted that in relation to this profession, the demands and expectations of society are very high, while often the ability of police officers to take adequate and prompt action is very limited.<sup>6</sup>

The purpose of this article is to try to determine the scale and causes of job burnout of the group of police officers, serving in selected police departments in the city of Krakow, based on the conducted research. Therefore, the article poses the following question as the main research problem: What is the scale of the phenomenon of job burnout and what are the reasons for it among the surveyed group of police officers serving in selected police departments in the city of Krakow?

The research used the method of a diagnostic survey using the technique of an online survey, which was conducted in April 2022. The Polish adaptation of the questionnaire to measure job burnout – The Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (OLBI) – was used as the main tool to examine the scale of job burnout.

One hundred police officers participated in the research, 70% of whom were men and 30% women. Due to the nature of the research, an important parameter in this case was the length of the service of police officers. The largest group of respondents (40%) were officers whose length of service was in the range of 1–5 years. The participation of all groups of police officers according to years of service was as follows:

- 1–5 years of work – 40%,
- 6–10 years of work – 26%,
- 11–15 years of work – 17%,
- 16–20 years of work – 11%,
- 21–25 years of work – 5%,
- years of work over 26 years – 1%.

The police officers in the study group proportionally represented the following police services and departments (25% each):

- Investigation Department,
- Criminal Department,
- Prevention Department,
- Traffic Department.

As for education, 61% of the surveyed group had a university degree, including 33% with a master's degree and 28% with a bachelor's degree, while the remaining people (39%) had a high school education.

---

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 71–72.

## The scale of the phenomenon of job burnout among police officers in selected police departments in the city of Krakow: results of own research

Professional burnout is undoubtedly associated with permanent and excessive stress, which consequently leads to loss of interest in work. The employee becomes less and less active and has a sense of lack of satisfaction with the tasks performed. Thus, we are dealing with a situation where a person previously highly committed to their work, gradually loses motivation for it and, at the same time, is experiencing mental, emotional and physical exhaustion.

According to Christina Maslach, the core of job burnout syndrome is emotional overload and subsequent emotional exhaustion. The individual becomes overly emotionally involved, overtired, and then feels overwhelmed by the emotional demands of other people. Emotional over-involvement means that the person treats success at work as equivalent to personal success, and failure at work as personal failure.<sup>7</sup>

Previous research indicates that the phenomenon of job burnout is also often found in young people, especially those who entered the workforce with a very strong commitment and a deep conviction of the important role their work should play in society. The phenomenon of job burnout most often occurs two to three years after starting work and affects people who have professions that involve contact with people such as nurses, teachers, doctors, as well as police officers. Many psychologists conclude from their research that people who are currently affected by occupational burnout previously may have been workaholics.<sup>8</sup>

Based on years of research on the phenomenon of occupational burnout and repeated attempts to define the syndrome, psychologists have distinguished two types of occupational burnout: active and passive. Active burnout is usually associated with working conditions, which include prolonged stress, precariousness of the position, but also excessive demands from superiors. Passive burnout, on the other hand, is the body's reaction to stress factors that cause emotional upset.<sup>9</sup>

The Polish adaptation of the questionnaire to measure professional job burnout – The Oldenburg Burnout Inventory – was used to examine the level of job burnout in the group of police officers. The OLBI questionnaire (presented in Table 1) allows you to measure two dimensions of occupational burnout: exhaustion and lack

<sup>7</sup> A.M. Pines, *Wypalenie – w perspektywie egzystencjalnej*, transl. by J. Radzicki, [in:] *Wypalenie zawodowe. Przyczyny i zapobieganie*, ed. H. Sęk, PWN, Warszawa 2009, p. 35.

<sup>8</sup> M. Ostrowska, R. Woźniak, *Analiza ryzyka wystąpienia zjawiska stresu i wypalenia zawodowego wśród funkcjonariuszy Policji* (Bezpieczeństwo i Obronność Series, vol. 17), Oficyna Wydawnicza KAAFM, Kraków 2018, p. 40.

<sup>9</sup> E. Starostka, *Wypalenie zawodowe – przyczyny, objawy i konsekwencje dla funkcjonowania społecznego jednostki*, Psychologia.net.pl, [www.psychologia.net.pl/artukul.php?level=245](http://www.psychologia.net.pl/artukul.php?level=245) [accessed: 20.07.2022].

of commitment. The tool contains 16 test items, eight items to measure each dimension. Each subscale contains four positively worded items and four negatively worded items. Responses are marked on a 4-point scale, from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.” In each subscale, half of the test items are worded negatively and half positively. To ensure the unidirectionality of the scale, test items formulated negatively are recalculated by inverting the scale. The sum of the test item scores divided by their number for the subscales of exhaustion and distancing from work gives a score on these subscales (range: 1–4). The higher the score, the correspondingly higher the two components of job burnout – exhaustion and distancing from work.<sup>10</sup>

Table 1. OLBI job burnout inventory with a score assigned to the answers

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. I always find new and interesting sides to my work * (LC)	1	2	3	4
2. There are days when I feel tired even before I leave for work (B)	4	3	2	1
3. It is becoming more and more common for me to speak negatively about my work (LC)	4	3	2	1
4. After work, I need more time to relax and feel better (B)	4	3	2	1
5. I can handle the demands of the job (work pressures) quite well * (B)	1	2	3	4
6. Recently, I've been thinking less and less in my work and starting to do my job almost automatically (LC)	4	3	2	1
7. I face positive challenges at work * (LC)	1	2	3	4
8. While working, I often feel emotionally exhausted (B)	4	3	2	1
9. As time goes by, a person begins to gain distance from what he does at work (LC)	4	3	2	1
10. After work, I have enough energy to engage in various activities that give me pleasure * (B)	1	2	3	4
11. Sometimes it makes me sick at the thought of work (LC)	4	3	2	1
12. After work, I usually feel exhausted and worn out (B)	4	3	2	1

<sup>10</sup> T. Chirkowska-Smolak, *Polska adaptacja kwestionariusza do pomiaru wypalenia zawodowego OLBI (The Oldenburg Burnout Inventory)*, “Studia Oeconomica Posnaniensia” 2018, vol. 6, no. 3, pp. 27–47, <http://docplayer.pl/115521880-Polska-adaptacja-kwestionariusza-do-pomiaru-wypalenia-zawodowego-olbi-the-oldenburg-burnout-inventory.html> [accessed: 20.07.2022].

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
13. This is the only kind of work I imagine I could do * (LC)	1	2	3	4
14. I usually do well with the amount of work I have to do * (B)	1	2	3	4
15. I feel more and more involved in my work * (LC)	1	2	3	4
16. When I work, I usually feel full of energy * (B)	1	2	3	4

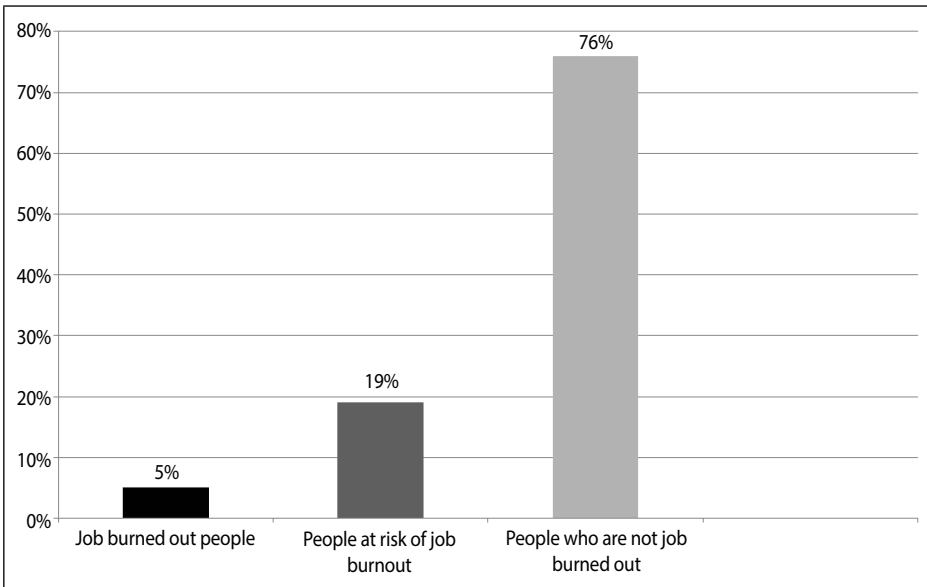
LC – lack of commitment; B – burnout; \* – positively worded items.

Source: authors' own compilation based on: Ł. Baka, B.A. Basińska, *Psychometryczne właściwości polskiej wersji Oldenburskiego Kwestionariusza Wypalenia Zawodowego (OLBI)*, "Medycyna Pracy" 2016, vol. 67, no. 1, pp. 29–41.

Keeping in mind the principles of calculating job burnout, according to the OLBI Inventory, the study group was divided into three groups according to the number of survey scores:

- individuals with job burnout (3.0–4.0 points),
- persons at risk of job burnout (2.0–2.99 points),
- individuals who are not job burned out (less than 1.99 points).

Figure 1. Level of job burnout of the surveyed group of respondents



Source: authors' own elaboration based on the conducted research.

The results of the survey are illustrated in Figure 1. The research showed that 5% of the respondents (4 men and 1 woman) can be definitely classified as job burned

out according to the methodology and the index of the OLBI. All of these people have a length of service in the range of 1–5 years and all are working in the Prevention Department.

On the other hand, 19% of respondents to the survey were classified as those at risk of job burnout. In this case, the largest group were officers who had length of service in the range of 16–20 years, and they accounted for 55% of this group. Ex aequo, in second place with a score of 40% in their groups, were officers who had length of service in the range of 1–5 years and 21–25 years. The lowest percentages (11.5% and 11.7%), in the context of those at risk of burnout were found in groups with length of service of 6–10 and 11–15 years.

Continuing the analysis of those at risk of job burnout, it should be noted that the largest number of people (42%) worked in the Prevention Department, while 26% worked in the Investigation Department, and 16 and 17% worked in the Criminal Division and the Traffic Department, respectively.

In the group of people at risk of job burnout – women constituted approx. 26%. Therefore, it can be argued that in this case, the percentage of women at risk of burnout was directly proportional to the overall share of women in the research, which was 30%.

## Causes of job burnout among the surveyed group of police officers: results of own research

Among the most frequently cited reasons, having a direct impact on the gradual feeling of lack of job satisfaction are tasks that are too difficult and responsible, which cause an employee to feel burdened by duties, as well as monotonous and exhausting work from which one does not derive satisfaction. The phenomenon of job burnout usually occurs when the task entrusted to us seems unfeasible or when our resources are too small to complete the task.<sup>11</sup>

The factors that lead to job burnout can be classified in different ways. Nina Ogińska-Bulik believes that the main stressors in the workplace include the following:<sup>12</sup>

- Poor physical working conditions (these include, but are not limited to: noise, excessive crowding or temperatures that are too low or too high);
- Stressors related to the way of work is performed (this includes, among others: time pressure, irrhythmic workflow, monotony, or working in shifts);

<sup>11</sup> A. Gembalska-Kwiecień, Z. Żurkowski, *Przyczyny i skutki wypalenia zawodowego*, “Zeszyty Naukowe Politechniki Śląskiej. Organizacja i Zarządzanie”, 2016, no. 97, p. 76.

<sup>12</sup> N. Ogińska-Bulik, *Stres zawodowy u policjantów. Źródła – konsekwencje – zapobieganie*, Wydawnictwo Wyższej Szkoły Humanistyczno-Ekonomicznej w Łodzi, Łódź 2003, pp. 19–24.

- Stressors associated with fulfilling an organizational role (these include, among others: ambiguity of the role consisting in the lack of knowledge and unclear role in the organization, and sometimes limitation in access or flow of information; role conflict – consisting mainly in receiving contradictory tasks and expectations coming from different people; role overload – occurring when a given person is not able to meet the expectations addressed to him);
- Stressors related to interpersonal relationships (these include generally bad relationships in the work group, manifested by a lack of trust, reluctance to help each other and indifference to other people's problems);
- Stressors related to the functioning of the individual as part of the organization (includes among others: lack of influence on decisions, lack of opportunity to express opinions, or lack of recognition for reliable work and restriction of initiative);
- Stressors related to professional development (including primarily dissatisfaction with the course of the current career and lack of prospects for further professional development);
- Stressors related to the simultaneous functioning of the individual in and outside the organization (this primarily refers to the conflict of roles between work and personal life, related to the lack of time to act in one of these spheres or both at the same time).

In the conducted research, in order to determine the main causes of burnout, the surveyed group was asked questions about: the causes of burnout, self-assessment of their professional competences and the relationship between the subordinate and the superior at the workplace, as well as the opinions of the surveyed officers in the context of their assessment of work performance by their superiors.

For the first question on expressing an opinion on the main causes of job burnout, each interviewer could choose or write in a total of up to six causes from among the following possibilities:

- low salaries,
- shift work and constant availability,
- working under intense time and performance pressure,
- chronic stress,
- excessive workload,
- lack of opportunity to influence the work performed,
- lack of support and competition in the workplace,
- frequent business trips,
- unfair evaluation of officers' work by superiors,
- monotony,
- lack of development and promotion prospects,
- other not mentioned above (write).

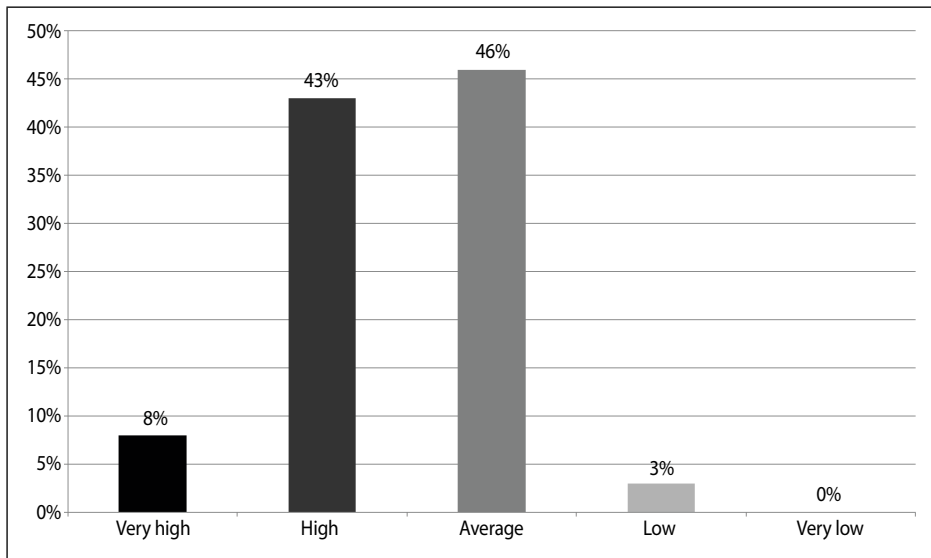


The results obtained may be a bit surprising. The largest number (82%) of officers indicated low salaries as one of the main causes of professional burnout. In second and third place, respectively, were the need to work under intense pressure of time and performance (72%) and shift work and constant availability (71%). This was followed by lack of development and promotion prospects (58%) and frequent business travel (54%), respectively. Surprisingly, only 45% of respondents cited long-term stress as one of the main reasons for police officers' burnout syndrome.

On the other hand, those who were classified as professionally burned out on the basis of the survey (they accounted for 5% of the surveyed group) indicated chronic stress, excessive workload, lack of support and competition in the workplace, and frequent business travel as the main reasons for this phenomenon. It should be noted that the choices of the occupational burnout group differ quite markedly from the main indications of the rest of the surveyed group.

As previous studies have shown, also lack of confidence in one's competence is one of the reasons for professional burnout. Therefore, the surveyed group was asked about the self-assessment of their competence in relation to the demands they face in their work. In this case, a five-point scale of self-assessment of their professional competence was used with the following possible answers: very high, high, average, low, very low (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Self-assessment of their professional competence by the surveyed group



Source: authors' own elaboration based on the conducted research.

In response to this question, 51% of respondents stated that they had high or very high professional competences. However, as many as 46% of respondents assess their knowledge and professional skills at an average level. In the opinion of the authors of the article, such a high percentage of those who assess their professional competence at an average level, may be due to the undermining of their competence by superiors or critical self-assessment by respondents resulting from their personal experience in this area. When asked about the relationship between supervisor and subordinate in the workplace, 89% of respondents described the relationship as definitely good or good. On the other hand, 11% of the respondents did not have a specific opinion on this subject – entering: “it is difficult to assess”. It is worth emphasizing that in the surveyed group, there were no negative indications in this area.

Another question in the survey concerned the appreciation by superiors of the work performed by each of the surveyed respondents. A positive answer in this regard (writing the answer: “definitely yes” or “yes”) was given by 51% of the respondents, while, as many as 47% of the respondents to such a question did not take a definite position in this regard, crossing out the answer “difficult to say”. Only 3% of responses to this question were negative, where the answer – “rather no” and “definitely no” were noted.

## Conclusions

In the opinion of the authors of this article, the assumed purpose of the research aimed at determining the scale and main causes of job burnout of a group of surveyed police officers serving in selected police departments in the city of Krakow was achieved. The selected techniques and research tools allowed to obtain appropriate answers of the respondents, which were analyzed in the context of the research problem. As a result of the research, the following general conclusions can be formulated:

- In the surveyed group of police officers, according to the OLBI Questionnaire, there were 5% of those found to be job burned out, and 19% of those at risk of job burnout;
- In the group of people burned out or at risk of job burnout – women accounted for about 25%, which was slightly lower than the share of women in the conducted research, which was 30%;
- All officers who were found to have job burnout had very little years of work (1–5 years) and all worked in the prevention service;
- As the main reasons for job burnout, the respondents pointed to low salaries, the need to work under intense pressure of time and performance, shift work and

constant availability, and the lack of prospects for development and promotion, as well as frequent business trips;

- On the same question of the causes of job burnout, those affected by the syndrome pointed to slightly different factors in this regard, which included chronic stress, excessive workload, lack of support and rivalry in the workplace, and frequent business travel;
- 51% of respondents said they had high or very high professional competence, while 46% of respondents rated their professional competence at an average level, which may suggest a lack of proper preparation for the profession and thus perhaps the need to verify training and courses;
- The vast majority of respondents (about 90%) gave a positive assessment of interpersonal relations occurring in the workplace.

Due to limited organizational and procedural possibilities, the research did not cover a larger number of police officers. Therefore, the results obtained should be regarded as a pilot research, which, in the opinion of the authors, at this stage fulfilled its role and thus allowed to solve the research problem. In order to obtain complete and reliable research in this area, it would be necessary to increase the number of people surveyed in accordance with the algorithm for determining the minimum research sample. Nevertheless, the results obtained can be used by interested institutions to expand the research in this area and to initially launch differentiated psychoprophylactic interventions aimed at interactions that minimize job burnout in its various dimensions.

## References

- Baka Ł., Basińska B.A., *Psychometryczne właściwości polskiej wersji Oldenburskiego Kwestionariusza Wypalenia Zawodowego (OLBI)*, "Medycyna Pracy" 2016, vol. 67, no. 1, pp. 29–41.
- Chirkowska-Smolak T., *Polska adaptacja kwestionariusza do pomiaru wypalenia zawodowego OLBI (The Oldenburg Burnout Inventory)*, "Studia Oeconomica Posnaniensia" 2018, vol. 6, no. 3, pp. 27–47, <http://docplayer.pl/115521880-Polska-adaptacja-kwestionariusza-do-pomiaru-wypalenia-zawodowego-olbi-the-oldenburg-burnout-inventory.html> [accessed: 20.07.2022].
- Freudenberger H.J., *Staff burnout*, "Journal of Social Issues" 1974, vol. 30, pp. 159–165.
- Gembalska-Kwiecień A., Żurkowski Z., *Przyczyny i skutki wypalenia zawodowego*, "Zeszyty Naukowe Politechniki Śląskiej. Organizacja i Zarządzanie" 2016, no. 97, pp. 73–83.
- Maslach Ch., *Wypalenie w perspektywie wielowymiarowej*, [in:] *Wypalenie zawodowe – przyczyny, mechanizmy, zapobieganie*, ed. H. Sęk, PWN, Warszawa 2000, pp. 13–31.
- Ogińska-Bulik N., *Stres zawodowy u policjantów. Źródła – konsekwencje – zapobieganie*, Wydawnictwo Wyższej Szkoły Humanistyczno-Ekonomicznej w Łodzi, Łódź 2003.
- Ostrowska M., Woźniak R., *Analiza ryzyka wystąpienia zjawiska stresu i wypalenia zawodowego wśród funkcjonariuszy Policji* (Bezpieczeństwo i Obronność Series, vol. 17), Oficyna Wydawnicza KAAFM, Kraków 2018.

Starostka E., *Wypalenie zawodowe – przyczyny, objawy i konsekwencje dla funkcjonowania społecznego jednostki*, Psychologia.net.pl, [www.psychologia.net.pl/artukul.php?level=245](http://www.psychologia.net.pl/artukul.php?level=245) [accessed: 20.07.2022].

Stawiarska P., *Wypalenie zawodowe w perspektywie wyzwań współczesnego świata*, Difin, Warszawa 2016.

Wielgus A., Tomaszewski J., *Wypalenie zawodowe*, Wydawnictwo M, Kraków 2013.

*Wypalenie zawodowe. Przyczyny i zapobieganie*, ed. H. Sęk, PWN, Warszawa 2009.

### *The phenomenon of job burnout on the example of police officers in the city of Krakow*

#### *Abstract*

Job burnout as a social phenomenon covers more and more groups of employees. The problem mainly affects professions of a social nature, which require constant contact with other people. Previous studies have shown that police service is classified as high-risk in the context of job burnout due to the mode and manner of work that police officers perform every day. In their work, policemen are faced with ever greater requirements regarding their competence, availability, high quality and appropriate pace of performed tasks. Therefore, in their service they are particularly vulnerable to being affected by job burnout syndrome. This article attempts to determine the extent of the phenomenon of job burnout syndrome and its causes in a group of police officers working and representing various police departments in the city of Krakow. The research was conducted on the basis of the Polish version of the Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (OLBI).

Key words: job burnout, policemen, Oldenburg Burnout Inventory, exhaustion, disengagement