

EEIA-2017
2017 International conference
"Education Environment for the Information Age"

**EMOTIONAL BURNOUT IN MEGALOPOLIS EDUCATION
ENVIRONMENT: HUMAN DESTRUCTION PHENOMENON**

Elena Ya. Orekhova (a)*, Nadezhda A. Shaidenko (b)

*Corresponding author

(a) Institute for Study of Childhood, Family and Upbringing of the Russian Academy of Education, 5/16, Makarenko St., 105062 Moscow, Russia, Lena.orekhova.63@mail.ru*,

(b) Tula State Pedagogical University n.a. L. N. Tolstoy, 300026, Tula, Russia

Abstract

The paper represents the results of the investigation of the factors that contribute to the development of emotional burnout syndrome and its manifestation among social service professionals.

The sample of the research included 2,235 social educators of the city of Moscow. They were asked to provide demographic and job-specific data and to complete the questionnaires.

The formed syndrome was observed in 19% of respondents, the syndrome in the phase of formation – in 66%, 16% of respondents did not show any signs of BOS.

The study showed a significant correlation between the level of burnout and locus of control. Social educators with a high level of burnout displayed lower indicators of internality than their colleagues without BOS.

The factors contributing to the development of burnout can be divided into two groups: objective factors caused by work conditions and subjective factors caused by professional's personality traits.

The findings of this research can be used for the development of more effective organisational strategies designed to reduce the risk of social educators' burnout in megalopolis education environment.

© 2017 Published by Future Academy www.FutureAcademy.org UK

Keywords: A syndrome of "emotional burnout", the social teachers, objective factors of "emotional burnout" (organizational and role) generated by working conditions or unreasoned organization; the subjective factors caused by features of the identity of the expert.

1. Introduction

In public consciousness, the emphasis has been traditionally placed on the positive aspects of social educator profession. But it's obvious that social work due to strict professional requirements, special responsibility and high emotional burdens involve the risk of difficult experiences connected with stressful work situations and the probability of developing occupational stress, including emotional burnout syndrome.

The term 'burnout' was introduced by Freudenberger in 1974. He used it to define the psychological state of people working in 'helping' professions who have to maintain close intensive interaction with their clients and patients in an emotionally overloaded atmosphere. Freudenberger defined staff burnout as 'a depletion of energy experienced by those professionals when they felt overwhelmed by others' problems'(Freudenberger, Richelson, 1980).

Today there are numerous definitions of burnout syndrome (hereafter referred to as 'syndrome' or BOS), which are used for investigations and publications in different countries (Le syndrome d'épuisement professionnel ou burnout ; Recherche sur le Burnout en Belgique : Sinthese, 2014).

2. Research Questions

The first article by Maslach on this topic published in 'Human Behaviour' in 1976 evoked an unexpected public response, mainly from non-professionals. According to her, she got a lot of letters from people working in different helping professions. And if initially, the matter referred only to health workers, so further research in this sphere gave the opportunity to extend investigations to other professions. Maslach's later works were devoted to social workers, teachers, policemen etc. She defined the personal characteristics which can contribute to the syndrome experienced by individuals. Among them: individual limitations of emotional Self to resist exhaustion and counteract burnout on the base of self-preservation; inner psychological experience including feelings, aims, motives, expectations; negative personal experience; distress, discomfort, dysfunctions and their consequences (Maslach, Leiter, 2011).

During the next years, psychologists published more than thousand articles on the problems of burnout and developed methods of diagnosing burnout syndrome (Langevin et al., 2014; Langevin, et al., 2012; Laschinger, Fida, 2014; Zawieja, 2015).

Some Russian psychologists define BOS as a variation of stress caused by communication with the clients of social services that act as stressors or result from different stress factors (Leonova, 2001).

3. Purpose of the Study

The aim of the research is to investigate the factors of the syndrome formation of "emotional burnout", to reveal the features of its manifestation in social educators in the educational space of Moscow.

4. Research Methods

For the investigation of the features of BOS formation among social educators, we used several research methods: questionnaires, analysis of documentation, and different testing methods which enabled us to detect the presence of the syndrome and analyse personal characteristics of the staff working in stationary and non-stationary settings.

The assessment of burnout was carried out using a questionnaire that contains three scales:

- tension (coping with traumatic experiences, self-dissatisfaction, anxiety and depression);
- resistance (inadequate selective emotional reaction, emotional and moral disorientation, an extension of emotions economy sphere, reduction of professional duties);
- exhaustion (emotional deficiency, emotional detachment, psychosomatic and psycho-vegetative disorders).

In order to find out which of stable personality motives (achievement or failure-avoidance motive) dominates the development of BOS, they were measured by means of the motivation assessment method.

The questionnaire on subjective control level used in the research was developed on the base of Rotter's Internal-External Locus of Control Scale (Rotter, 1966). According to Rotter, a locus of control refers to people's perception about the causes of the situations that affect their lives. People with an external locus of control generally believe that events result from outside forces while those with an internal locus of control interpret the important things in their lives as the outcomes of their own actions. The questionnaire contains seven scales: the scale of general internality; the scale of internality in the sphere of success; the scale of internality in the sphere of failure; the scale of internality in the sphere of family relationships; the scale of internality in the sphere of workplace relationships; the scale of internality in the sphere of interpersonal relationships; the scale of internality in the health sphere.

For the investigation of respondents' personality traits, we chose Cattell's Personality Factor Questionnaire (Cattell, Eber, Tatsuoka, 1988).

We also took into account the considerations of the leading scientists in the field of psychology of burnout and the results of their latest research (Alvesson, Spicer, 2016; Douillet, 2013; Monneuse, 2013; Pezet-Langevin, 2014; Zawieja, Guarnieri (eds), 2013).

5. Findings

The research was carried out in stationary and non-stationary settings of the city of Moscow. The sample included 2,235 participants employed in different positions who were divided into three groups: social workers – 30.4%, social educators – 53.2%, directors and managers of social education services – 16.4% of respondents. The average age of participants was 39.2 years, 34.6 % were aged between 18 and 36 years, 65.4 % - between 36 and 55. 62.1% of participants were married, 37.9% were single. With respect to their education, 28.7% of social workers reported certificate of secondary education, 34.9% - vocational certificate or associate degree obtained at the post-secondary level, 22.8% - the university degree, and 12.6% of respondents haven't completed a tertiary study. The length of professional experience ranged from 0 to above 10 years with the following distribution: 40.2% - 0-5 years, 34.5% - 5-10 years, 25.3% - above 10 years.

The formed syndrome was observed in 19% of respondents, the syndrome in the phase of formation – in 66%, 16% of respondents didn't show any signs of BOS.

The study revealed the following features of the formation and manifestation of emotional burnout syndrome among social service professionals.

66% of social educators showed the symptom 'coping with traumatic experiences' in the phase of domination, the symptom 'reduction of professional duties' is formed in 52% of respondents, 'inadequate selected emotional reaction' – in 47%. The symptoms 'anxiety and depression' (revealed in 50%) and 'psychosomatic and psycho vegetative disorders' (35.7%) are in the phase of formation.

The integrated indicator 'resistance' in the phase of domination was revealed in 44.3%, the indicator 'exhaustion' in the phase of formation – in 35.7%.

No symptoms were observed in 16% of respondents.

The findings show that the problem of BOS is of current significance for social educators. It demands the development of preventive measures against syndrome formation and appropriate work for the psychosocial rehabilitation of the staff.

The comparison of demographic characteristics in different stages of burnout revealed that the formed syndrome predominantly occurs in the group of respondents aged between 18 and 36 years (84.6%), i.e. young professionals are at a higher risk of developing burnout syndrome. At the same time, 63.6% of older employees (36-55 age group) didn't show symptoms of BOS. It is likely that older social educators have already passed through the stage of professional establishment and adaptation, worked out the mechanism of professional self-preservation, they are aware of their goals, and have stable professional interests.

With regard to marital status, there are no significant differences in burnout levels between married and single participants. Correlation analysis found that marital status affects the development of some BOS symptoms. Single social educators reported such symptoms as resistance and emotional detachment. The family is most likely to be a factor which reduces the influence of different occupational stresses as it performs a recreational and psychotherapeutic function related to the psychological support of family members. But at the same time, a dysfunctional family may become a stress factor and cause BOS aggravation.

Burnout in the phase of formation is more common in the group of social educators with a vocational degree (58.7%) and with a certificate of secondary education (10.9%). In the group of respondents with university degree BOS is less common (53.8% of employees lacked any evidence of the syndrome). It can be explained by the fact that professional education at higher level provides social service professionals with a wide range of methods, variants and ways to handle with occupational tasks and problems. It reduces self-dissatisfaction, anxiety and depression caused by insufficient professional knowledge and skills deficit. In addition, higher education widens specialists' horizon in the sphere of psychology, conflictology, medicine, pedagogy and gives them an opportunity to use effective techniques of professional self-preservation and to successfully overcome burnout.

The prevalence of the formed syndrome was noted among social workers (46.2%); it is less common among social educators (36.4%). We explain it by the fact that social workers interact directly with clients and experience psychological burdens to a far greater extent than those employed in other positions as they have to encounter people's sorrow and despair, share their pain and sympathise with

them. Directors and managers of social education services are also at risk of burnout but it is caused by a great responsibility for managerial decision making and in general for the organisation of work in the social service settings.

The research also documented that the participants with the early stage of BOS work in social services less than five years (52.2%), while 45.5% of those who have a longer professional experience (5-10 years) reported no symptoms of the syndrome. The formed burnout syndrome is common to an equal extent among the respondents with more than 10 years of work experience and those who came into the profession less than five years ago (38.5%).

6. Discussion

The comparison of the levels of satisfaction with different organisational factors at workplace showed the following results. 45.5% of social educators satisfied with working conditions lack burnout, and 7.6% of those who are not satisfied reported a high burnout rate. These findings confirm that adverse working conditions increase the risk of burnout development while supportive workplace environment reduces the influence of occupational stress.

The investigation of salary satisfaction revealed that approximately equal percentage of social workers satisfied and not satisfied with salary rate lack BOS symptoms, i.e. the satisfaction with salary doesn't influence the burnout development.

The majority of social educators satisfied with the possibilities of professional development (54.5%) don't experience burnout. It can be assumed that competency and the ability to effectively solve patients' problems is a factor of professional self-preservation. At the same time, it's important to improve professional skills in the workplace: through self-education during practice, through the adoption of colleagues' experience during short-term courses, workshops and training.

The study showed that the rate of satisfaction with the variety of professional duties influences the probability of BOS development: the higher the satisfaction the lower the risk of burnout. But 30.7% of respondents satisfied with the variety of professional duties reported high indicators of burnout syndrome. Therefore an excessive diversity of occupational tasks, an ambiguity of functions, incorrect job descriptions might be the stress factors causing burnout. It's important to note that the perception of the job as prestigious decreases burnout risk. Not coincidentally, 45.5% of the respondents who consider their profession prestigious lack the symptoms of BOS.

An important factor of burnout development among social educators is a relationship with their immediate supervisor. Strained relationship with supervisor contributes to the formation of such BOS symptoms as self-dissatisfaction and psychosomatic disorders. Unfriendly workplace relationships also cause the development of such BOS symptoms as exhaustion and depersonalization.

The majority of social educators unsatisfied with work organisation (76.9%) display a high level of burnout. The findings showed that the less the respondents were satisfied with work organisation the higher level of BOS they reported including higher indicators of self-dissatisfaction, feeling of being caged, emotional exhaustion.

The study documented that those social educators who experience psychological and emotional burdens tend to have higher indicators of resistance and such symptoms of burnout as psychosomatic

disorders, self-dissatisfaction, an extension of emotions economy sphere, inadequate selective emotional reaction.

The investigation of locus of control of social service employees can be summarised as follows.

High indicators of burnout syndrome are more common among professionals with lower scores on the scales 'general internality' (3.6), 'internality in the situations of failure' (3.0), 'internality in the sphere of workplace relationships' (2.7). The respondents without BOS symptoms scored significantly higher on these scales: 'general internality' – 5.3, 'internality in the situations of failure' – 7.1, 'internality in the sphere of workplace relationships' – 7.3.

The index of internality among the respondents with the early stage of burnout is close to the index of those with the formed syndrome on the following scales: 'internality in the sphere of success', 'internality in the sphere of failure', 'internality in the sphere of family relationships', and 'internality in the sphere of interpersonal relationships'. The indicators on the scale of internality in the health sphere are also approximately equal among the participants with different burnout rate.

Social educators with a high level of burnout displayed significantly lower indicators of internality than their colleagues without BOS. Thus, internality can be regarded as an important marker of maturity of an individual, i.e. of the ability to make decisions in different spheres of life and to take responsibility for them without hoping for a chance or luck, to control behaviour and feelings. If a social educator takes a passive role or blames others because of failures s/he just gets a growing sense of weakness and hopelessness.

Social educators can place responsibility outside of themselves in different ways. For example: 'I have bad luck because the clients oppose consulting and don't want to change anything in their lives', 'the organization of work leaves much to be desired that's why the outcomes don't depend on me', 'I have far too many clients and too little time for each of them'. Employees who take a passive role tend to capitulate to outer circumstances and feel like a victim what contributes to BOS formation. Therefore, burnout development correlates with the type of locus of control displayed by social workers.

Professionals with an external locus of control are more prone to burnout than their counterparts with an internal locus. The risk of BOS development increases if employees have low indicators on the scales 'general internality', 'internality in the sphere of failure', 'internality in the sphere of workplace relationships'. The lower their indicators on the scales 'internality in the sphere of failure', 'internality in the sphere of workplace relationships' are the higher level of burnout is. The lower the score on the scale 'internality in the sphere of workplace relationships' the more those respondents suffer from such symptoms of burnout as anxiety and depression. The lower the indicators of internality in the sphere of failure and in the sphere of workplace relationships are the higher reduction of professional duties are. Emotional deficiency, depersonalization, psychosomatic and psycho vegetative disorders are higher among respondents with a low internality in the sphere of failure and in the sphere of success.

The analysis based on the motivation assessment method showed that the majority of participants (55.7%) do not have a dominating motive; achievement motive was reported by 24.3% of respondents, failure-avoidance motive by 20%.

Social educators with a high level of burnout displayed a predominant failure-avoidance motivation as they permanently experience stress and anxiety caused by a sense of their own incompetence and tend to be passive for fear of failure. These feelings and moods feed burnout syndrome.

It can be argued that failure-avoidance motive is more common among professionals with a high risk of BOS (46.2%) while achievement motivation (63.6%) reduces burnout risks.

Correlation analysis showed that failure-avoidance motive dominates among social educators with such symptoms of BOS as tension, coping with traumatic experiences, resistance, inadequate selective emotional reaction, reduction of professional duties, psychosomatic and psycho vegetative disorder.

The respondents with a high burnout level reported a higher indicator on Factor A which describes the features of dynamics of emotional experiences. Social educators with formed BOS tend to display predominantly vivid and intense emotions with significant mood swings throughout the day; they quickly respond to all the events that happen around them, their aggression is expressive, and emotional experiences are powerful.

The risk of BOS development depends on personality characteristics. Reserved, shy, emotionally unstable people as well as impulsive and impatient ones, those with high empathy and reactivity and weak self-sufficiency are more prone to burnout.

Emotional stability as an ability to maintain optimal performance in the emotionogenic environment also correlates with the level of self-concept which in its turn closely connected with anxiety (inadequate self-concept reduces emotional stability). The higher indicators on Factor A the more the respondents suffer from such symptoms of BOS as anxiety, reduction of professional duties and depersonalization.

Respondents without BOS can be described as cold, tough, formal. They don't take an interest in others, keep away from people, prefer working alone, and avoid collective events. Therefore the highest risk of burnout is much more common among social workers who actively communicate with clients, take everything to heart, and do their best to help clients.

Professionals with a high level of burnout score lower on Factor C. Low indicators on Factor C provide evidence of emotional instability, emotional immaturity that contributes to burnout development. Social workers with BOS tend to have less control over their emotions; they feel helpless, tired and unable to cope with life's challenges. They easily get annoyed with events and people and often display neurotic reactions in form of psychosomatic disorders. The higher indicators on Factor C are less severe the symptom 'psychosomatic and psycho vegetative disorders'.

Factor E had moderate indicators among respondents with a high level of burnout, while social educators without BOS reported low indicators on this factor. As evident from the data, employees with conformity stance are less prone to BOS than those who are independent and dominant. 'Burned-out' professionals usually act vigorously, aggressively assert their rights, ignore conventions and do not depend on authoritative opinions. We consider that it happens because nonconformers get into conflicts more often and have to accept responsibility for their bold actions.

Proactive work behaviour is significantly related to the search for self-actualization in an occupational sphere and therefore to rising expectations concerning work outcomes. But the outcomes of social work in education environment are often temporally distant and not always meet expectations as they depend not only on social educators but to a great extent on the clients who make decisions themselves. That's why professionals might get a sense that they 'work for nothing', that their work is meaningless and depreciated.

Respondents with a strongly-marked BOS reported a high indicator on Factor C and therefore are more prone to burnout because of excessive responsibility, conscientiousness, sturdiness of moral principles.

Respondents with formed BOS also scored higher on Factor I which is evidence of their sentimentality and kindness, at the same time they can be characterised as courageous, severe, practical, realistic. Participants without BOS have lower indicators on Factor L. They are trusting and unselfish, accepting and tolerant, compliant and cheerful; and get along well with colleagues. A higher score on Factor O is more common among respondents with a marked BOS. Such people are sad, anxious, worried, vulnerable, impressionable, conscientious, sensitive to blame and reprimands, hypochondriacal. 'Burned-out' professionals have a lower indicator on Factor Q2; therefore characterless, dependent, group-oriented people are more prone to burnout. Factor Q4 is higher among respondents with formed BOS. They are more anxious, nervous, unstable and aggressive; they tend to display irritability and impatience.

An important sign of occupational burnout is gradually increasing self-dissatisfaction, growing indifference and apathy, a reducing sense of personal success and increasing doubts about the importance of professional activity. Professionals with burnout syndrome often experience the feeling of their own incompetence, become indifferent toward their work and might change their attitude toward the life values that were important to them before.

7. Conclusion

The factors contributing to the development of burnout can be divided into two groups:

- objective factors (organisational factors and role factors) caused by work conditions or by its poorly thought-out organisation;
- subjective factors caused by professional's personality traits.

Both groups are tightly connected with each other. On the one hand, a long-term psycho traumatic influence of objective factors can cause the deformation of professional's personality. On the other hand, subjective factors manifest themselves negatively mainly due to prolonged exposure to objective factors. Possible disorders can affect both social educator's professional activity and his personality. As social service professionals are at a high risk for burnout the organisations should take measures to prevent work-related stress, maintain psychological hygiene of the staff and implement the programs of psychological support for social educators.

The findings of this research can be used for the development of more effective organisational strategies designed to reduce the risk of burnout. The knowledge of distinctive features of burnout manifestation among social educators will help timely recognise burnout syndrome and select appropriate preventive techniques to mitigate its occurrence, including developing psychological training programs, teaching employees coping strategies and self-care practices and providing essential supervision.

References

- Alvesson, M., Spicer, A. (2016). *The stupidity paradox: The power and Pitfalls of Functional Stupidity at Work*. Pearson.
- Cattell, R.B., Eber, H.W. Tatsuoka, M.M. (1988). *Handbook for the Sixteen Personality Factor Questionnaire (16 PF)*. Institute for Personality and Ability Testing.
- Douillet, Ph. (2013). *Prévenir les risques psychosociaux: outils et méthodes pour réguler le travail*. Anact, collection Agir sur...
- Freudenberger, H.J., Richelson, G. (1980). *Burnout: The High Cost of High Achievement, 90*. NY.: Doubleday.
- Langevin, V., Boini, S., François, M., Riou, A. (2012). Malsach Burnout Inventory (MBI). *Références en santé au travail*, 131 p.
- Langevin, V., Boini, S., François, M., Riou, A. (2014). Copenhagen Burnout Inventory (CBI). *Références en santé au travail*, 138 p.
- Laschinger, H.K.S., Fida, R. (2014). New nurses burnout and workplace wellbeing: The influence of authentic leadership and psychological capital. *Burnout Research Vol. 1, Issue 1*, pp.19-28
- Le syndrome d'épuisement professionnel ou burnout. DGT, Anact, INRS. Retrieved from <http://www.inrs.fr/risques/epuisement-burnout/ce-qu-il-faut-retenir.html>
- Leonova, A.B. (2001). Main Approaches to Investigation of Occupational Stress. *Bulletin of Psychosocial, Correctional and Rehabilitation Work, 1*, 2-16
- Maslach, Ch., Leiter, M.P. (2011). *Burn-out. Le syndrome d'épuisement professionnel*. Les Arènes.
- Monneuse, D. (2013). *Surprésentéisme. Travailler malgré la maladie*. de Boeck, collection Méthodes et recherches management.
- Pezet-Langevin, V. (2014). *Burnout : mieux connaître l'épuisement professionnel*. Hygiène et sécurité du travail, 237, pp.6-9.
- Recherche sur le Burnout en Belgique : Sinthese. (2014). Service public fédéral Emploi, Travail et Concertation sociale. Retrieved from <http://www.emploi.belgique.be>
- Rotter, J.B., (1966). Generalized expectancies for internal versus external control of reinforcement. Psychological Monograph: *General and Applied, V. 80*, pp. 1-28.
- Zawieja, Ph. (2015). *Le burn out*. Presses universitaires de France (Puf).
- Zawieja, Ph., Guarnieri, F. (Eds). (2013). *Épuisement professionnel. Approches innovantes et pluridisciplinaires*. Armand Colin/Recherches.