

UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS' PROFESSIONAL BURNOUT AND ITS FEATURES

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Abstract

The article is devoted to the problem of professional burnout, which has not lost its relevance both theoretically and in practice for several decades. The activity of a teacher is characterized by communicative and emotional saturation, increased responsibility, which is one of the factors of burnout. At the same time, it is noted that nowadays the socio-economic changes taking place all over the world strengthen the effect of unfavorable factors of the professional environment, increasing the level of psycho-emotional stress of teachers. Despite the research data showing that university professors are less prone to professional burnout, compared with their colleagues at other levels of education, this phenomenon is becoming commonplace in the system of higher education. Therefore, the purpose of this research was to study the features of professional burnout of university professors in comparison with school teachers. The study was conducted with the use of the questionnaire "Professional burnout" (N.E. Vodopyanova, E.S. Starchenkova), which allows to determine both the level of burnout and the expressiveness of its structural components. The study showed exposure to university professors' professional burnout: all employees in various degrees showed signs of burnout, while a high level of professional burnout was diagnosed in 40.8% of university professors of Mari State University (Russia). It was found out that they have all indicators of burnout: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment. The peculiarity of university professors' burnout is the structural coherence and homogeneity of professional burnout, the relationship with the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents: the length of work experience, the position.

Keywords: depersonalization, emotional exhaustion, university professors, pedagogical activity, reduced personal accomplishment, professional burnout.

1 INTRODUCTION

In the modern world, the consequence of increasing the tension of professional activity, increasing information, communication, emotional stress together with a violation of a harmonious lifestyle of a person is the professional burnout of representatives of sociology professions (Orel, 2005; Kurapova, 2016; Dierendonck, Schaufeli & Sixma, 1994; Maslach & Letter, 1997). As a result of paradigmatic changes in the

Russian education system at all levels, the problem of burnout is becoming particularly acute. Among the essential aspects of pedagogical activity that affect the occurrence of burnout, one can note high emotional tension, excessive work, high social expectations with a low general prestige of the profession, and low support from colleagues and the administration. All of these factors, in our opinion, will not decrease over time, and it will inevitably lead to an increase in the expression of the signs of burnout (Kurapova, 2016). Despite research data showing that university professors are less prone to burnout, organizational changes in the system of higher education cannot but affect the mental state of teachers.

The purpose of this research was to study the phenomenon of professional burnout and its features of university professors. The subject of the research - features of university professors' professional burnout. Research hypothesis: professional burnout of university professors is a characteristic phenomenon; burnout is manifested in the formation of all its interconnected structural components. The main objective of the research is to study the problems of professional burnout in psychology, to determine the characteristics of burnout in the educational environment, in particular in higher education. The cross-sectional research is selected as the method of organizing the research. Empiric data was collected through testing. The data array obtained during the research was subjected to quantitative and qualitative analysis. Statistical data processing was performed using the SPSS package (Spearman rank correlation, Mann-Whitney U-test).

2 OVERVIEW

The phenomenon of burnout began to be studied in the 70s of the XX century, first by employees of public and medical organizations, and then by teachers. Currently, a significant number of works is devoted to the problem of professional burnout, including teachers (Pines & Aronson, 1988; Maslach & Letter, 1997; Cordes & Dougherty, 1993; Borisova, 2005; Orel, 2005; Ovsjannikova & Tajsaeva, 2014; Vodopyanova & Starchenkova, 2005; Kurapova, 2009, etc.). There is a variety of terminology when describing burnout, but the term "professional burnout" clarifies, in our opinion, the subject field of the problem (Vodopyanova & Starchenkova, 2005; Kurapova, 2009).

In psychology, there are several approaches to the definition of the burnout, its mechanisms and structure. In this research, we rely on a three-factor burnout model, where it is considered as a condition that includes emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and the reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach & Letter, 1997). The main component is emotional exhaustion, expressed in the feeling of emotional emptiness and fatigue caused by work. Psychologically, burnout begins to manifest itself in the gradual development of negative attitudes towards oneself, work and those with whom one has to work. Among the factors of burnout, it is customary to single out organizational and individual factors (Orel, 2005). Among individual factors, the characteristics of the socio-demographic situation of workers, in particular age, are noted.

The research results also show that the personality characteristics of a teacher play an important role in the occurrence of burnout. So, for beginning teachers during the formation of an individual style of professional activity, peculiar characteristics are important in the development of burnout. At the maturity stage, burnout is more determined by personal qualities. Further, the role of personal traits decreases, and professional and life experience become more important. With age, teachers accumulate fatigue, not always positive emotional and behavioral stereotypes appear, which contribute to the occurrence of burnout.

Some authors (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993; Maslach & Goldberg, 1998) assign the decisive role in the occurrence of burnout to the organizational factor. The factors of teachers' burnout include unsatisfactory psychological climate, poor organization of work: a low level of independence, uneven distribution of workloads, low wages, the inability to use non-traditional methods of work, professional growth and inclusion in management (Borisova, 2005).

It is generally emphasized (Vodopyanova & Starchenkova, 2005), that burnout occurs under the influence of external and internal factors arising simultaneously. Separately, they may not cause burnout, but their cumulative effect may exceed the adaptive resources of a person, resulting in burnout. At the same time, the main cause of burnout is excessive communication with people, a type of activity that requires special emotional costs (Kurapova, 2016). Burnout negatively affects the efficiency and productivity of the professional activity, leads to a decrease in adaptation and inadequate use of psychological defenses, and therefore, the development of destructive qualities of a person. At the same time, professional burnout of teachers prevents the development of empathic abilities, but contributes to the development of their aggressiveness.

All this factors allow us to consider the burnout as a systemic quality of the subject of professional activity, which is manifested in negative mental state, attitudes, attitudes towards oneself and other subjects of the activity as the cause and effect of a decrease in resource provision at different levels of psychological

regulation. It is established that there are intra- professional differences of teachers' burnout (Borisova, 2005), and it is connected with different tasks of pedagogical activity at different levels of education and with different communication styles of teachers. At the same time, there are practically no studies showing the differences in professional burnout among teachers of educational organizations at different levels, although each of them is characterized by organizational specifics.

So, the professional burnout of a teacher is one of the options for the disturbed interaction of the subject and professional activities. It arises as a result of the cumulative impact of organizational and individual factors. Certain characteristics of a professional activity are often determined by the subjective characteristics of specialists that make up its core. At the same time, organizational factors most likely act as primary determinants of a teacher's professional burnout.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

From the conceptual positions of the system and subject-activity approaches in psychology to the problem of burnout, we may speak about the mutual influence of a professional activity and the subject of labor (B.F. Lomov, A.V. Brushlinskij, V.A. Bodrov, and L.G. Dikaja), psychosocial diseases in society (L.A. Kitaev-Smyk, C. Maslach, and M.P. Leiter). The theoretical background of the research is a resultative approach to the burnout (S. Jackson, C. Maslach, A.M. Pines, N.E. Vodopyanova), in particular, a three-factor burnout model (S. Jackson, C. Maslach).

To study the professional burnout of university professors, the questionnaire "Professional burnout" was used (N.E. Vodopyanova, E.S. Starchenkova), which contains 22 statements about feelings associated with performing a professional activity. It contains 3 subscales. High scores for the subscales of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization and low scores for the subscale of the reduced personal accomplishment mean a high level of the burnout.

Emotional exhaustion is a feeling of psycho emotional overstrains, emptiness and it manifests itself in a feeling of muffled, dull emotions, emotional restraint, and disruptions are possible. Depersonalization is a change in attitude to subjects of an activity towards aggression, negativism, soullessness and cynicism. Contacts are becoming more formal, depersonalized, and critical. Reduced personal accomplishment – a reduced working productivity, disappointment, a reduced professional motivation and confidence in one's own professional competence, efficiency. It manifests itself in dissatisfaction with oneself, others, negative self-attitude.

The professors of the faculty of Psychology and Pedagogics of the Mari State University (Yoshkar-Ola) in number of 27 people took part in the research. The sample of the study was presented mainly by women (96.3%); the average age was 47.4 years. The length of work experience of the professors varies from 3 to 45 years. The average work experience is 25.2 years. Almost a third of them perform administrative functions.

To study the characteristics of professional burnout among professors in the system of higher education, a comparative analysis was carried out with burnout indicators for teachers of secondary educational institutions (SBEI RME "Multidisciplinary boarding school") and nursery teachers of preschool educational organizations (MBPEI "Kindergarten No. 13 of Yoshkar-Ola" Klyukovka).

The sample of the study consisted of teachers in number of 23 people aged from 34 to 60 years and a length of teaching experience of 4 to 36 years; kindergarten teachers in number of 20 people aged 25 to 57 years and a length of teaching experience from 1 year to 32 years. In total, 70 teachers took part in the research.

4 RESULTS

The results of the study of professional burnout of teachers were subjected to a thorough quantitative and qualitative analysis. The main expressions of burnout of university teachers are represented in Fig. 1.

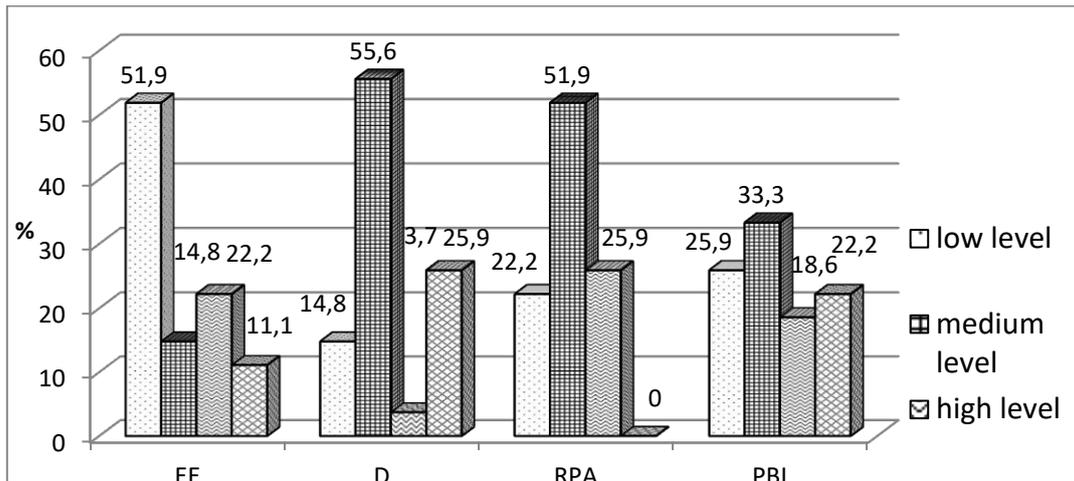


Fig.1. Indicators of professional burnout of university professors

EE – emotional exhaustion

D – depersonalization

RPA – reduced personal accomplishment

PBI – professional burnout index

Characterizing the professional burnout of professors, the predominance of a high level of burnout (in total 40.8%) can be noted, and it indicates their expressed emotional exhaustion, cynical attitude towards others, and low satisfaction with self-realization in the professional sphere.

Half of the respondents have a low level of emotional exhaustion, but the total percentage of respondents with a high level is more than 30%. It suggests that respondents are divided according to the level of emotional exhaustion into 2 diametrically opposite groups - with a low level of burnout and a high level of burnout. For the remaining parameters of burnout, half of the respondents show a medium level of expressiveness. Moreover, in 28.1% of the respondents, all burnout indicators have the same expressiveness.

The level of professional burnout of respondents is determined equally by all components of burnout, which is confirmed by correlation analysis (Fig. 2).

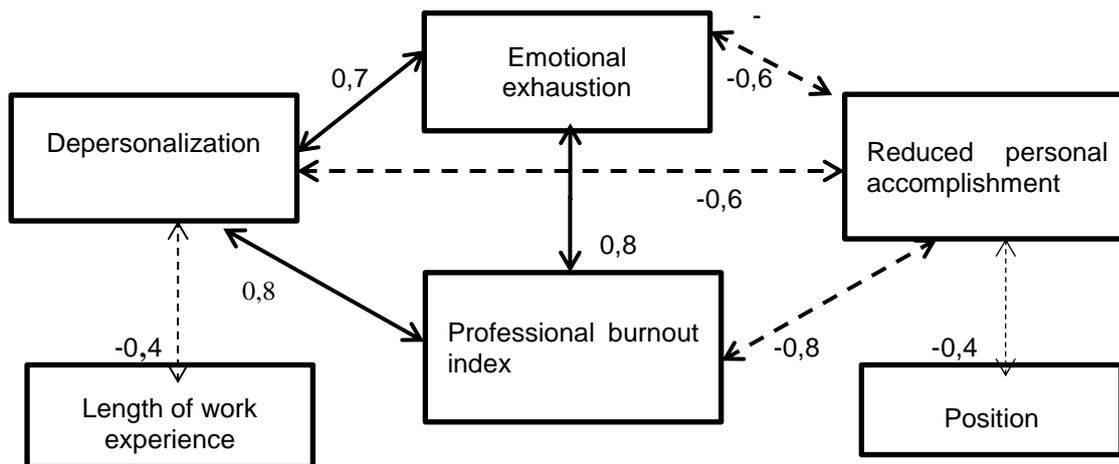


Fig. 2. Structural diagram of indicators of professors' professional burnout

————- direct correlation

- - - - - inverse correlation

————- p ≤ 0,05

————- p ≤ 0,01

It can be seen in the figure that all the components of burnout are interconnected, and in the average version: the reduced personal accomplishment has feedback with the components of burnout. The lower the level of job satisfaction and productivity, the higher the level of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and burnout index.

The relationship of depersonalization with the length of work experience is also obtained ($r=-0,4$; $p\leq 0,05$): the less a professor works, the higher the level of cynicism towards people; and reduced personal accomplishment with the position ($r=-0,4$; $p\leq 0,05$): the higher the job title of the employee, the lower the likelihood of low productivity.

So, the professors of the university show the signs of professional burnout, which are characterized by the expressiveness of all burnout indicators (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and personal accomplishment) equally. Therefore, the peculiarity of the burnout of professors is its structural coherence and homogeneity, the correlation with the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents: the length of work experience, the position.

A research of burnout among teachers of educational organizations at other levels was conducted to identify the characteristics of burnout of university professors. It was found that most school teachers have a medium level of burnout (52, 4%), and it corresponds to the normal distribution of data. Teachers have the least emotional exhaustion (71% have a low level of expressiveness), and the most depersonalization (40% of teachers have a high and very high level), i.e. respondents show a negative, soulless attitude towards others, they try not to waste efforts, they are dubious and they have a reduced sense of professional competence, they are characterized by negative self-perception.

At the same time, they have no feeling of emotional overstrain and a feeling of emptiness. A correlation analysis of the burnout components and socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents showed the presence of close relationships between the burnout level and its components ($p = 0.01$) and their absence between the burnout components themselves. The inverse correlation was also revealed between the reduced personal accomplishment and the age of teachers ($r = -0.6$; $p = 0.01$): the older the teacher, the lower his professional success.

Indicators of professional burnout of kindergarten teachers were subjected to a similar analysis for a comparison of burnout within the pedagogical profession. Most teachers have a medium level of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization (70% and 60%, respectively) and a high level of reduced personal accomplishment, which is expressed in reduced working productivity and low professional self-esteem. It is noteworthy that not a single respondent with a low level of depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment has been identified, and it indicates a critical state of professional health of kindergarten teachers. All these features lead to a high level of burnout of respondents as a whole (70%). Correlation analysis showed the presence of correlations of all burnout components with the burnout index. The correlations between depersonalization and all components of burnout were also revealed: the higher depersonalization, the higher emotional exhaustion and lower working productivity. At the same time, there are correlations between the reduced personal accomplishment and the age ($r = -0.8$; $p = 0.01$) and the length of work experience ($r = -0.7$; $p = 0.01$), and it indicates a decrease in professional self-esteem among teachers with age.

A comparative analysis of professional burnout of teachers of educational organizations at various levels revealed its specific features among university professors, school teachers and kindergarten teachers. The highest level of burnout compared with other categories of teachers was found in kindergarten teachers ($U_e = 48$; $p = 0.01$), it can be explained by the cumulative nature of the impact of a number of organizational factors related to the age characteristics of children, the introduction of inclusion in education, change in the mode of work of kindergarten teachers (3 teachers for 2 groups), and the personal characteristics of teachers associated with the risk of professional burnout.

The lower level of burnout of school teachers in this sample is related to the specifics of students: only selected children from different regions of the Mari El Republic study in this lyceum and the learning process is carried out according to programs for working with gifted children. Also, school teachers have the lowest level of emotional exhaustion, both in comparison with kindergarten teachers ($U_e = 67$; $p = 0.05$), and with university professors ($U_e = 180$; $p = 0.01$). Professors and kindergarten teachers experience burnout of emotional, physical, energy resources, which is expressed in chronic emotional and physical fatigue, indifference and coldness towards others, irritation (Fig. 3).

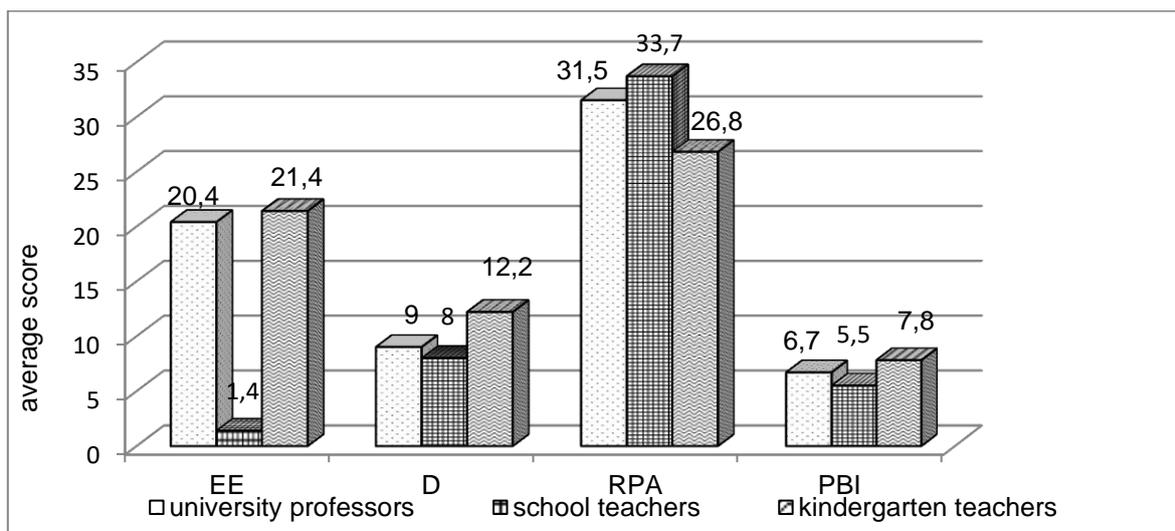


Fig. 3. Indicators of professional burnout in various categories of educators

EB – emotional exhaustion

D – depersonalization

RPA – reduced personal accomplishment

PBI – professional burnout index

Depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment as expressions of burnout are mostly represented in the sample of kindergarten teachers ($U_e = 83$; $p = 0.05$ and $U_e = 68.5$; $p = 0.05$, respectively), corresponding to a high level of expressiveness. At the same time, professors and school teachers did not have significant differences in the expressiveness of these burnout parameters. Kindergarten teachers demonstrate a decrease in the number of contacts with others, increased irritability in communication situations, and negativity towards other people. A decrease in the sense of competence in their work, dissatisfaction with themselves, a decrease in the value of their work, and negative self-perception in the professional sphere are less characteristic for professors and school teachers than for kindergarten teachers. The motivational sphere of school teachers and university professors is characterized by the productivity of professional activity, interest in work, a sense of professional competence.

Thus, an empirical research made it possible to describe both general pedagogical characteristics of burnout and specifics for higher education.

5 CONCLUSIONS

For teachers, regardless of the level of educational organization, the professional burnout is a characteristic phenomenon, due to the content of their activities: high communicative and emotional richness, and as a result, high stress; social responsibility. Professional burnout leads to a decrease in professional efficiency, professional motivation of teachers. All the burnout components are associated with its level in the normative version: the higher the level of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and the lower professional efficiency, the higher the burnout index.

The features of professional burnout of university professors, in contrast to school teachers and kindergarten teachers, have been determined: professional burnout is characterized by the expressiveness of all its parameters (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment) equally, structural coherence and homogeneity, correlation with the length of work experience and the position. So, the hypothesis that professional burnout of university professors is a characteristic phenomenon; burnout is expressed in the formation of all its structural interconnected components, found its confirmation.

6 SUMMARY

The consequence of increasing the tension of professional activity, increasing information, communication, emotional stress in violation of a harmonious lifestyle of a person has become an increasingly widespread professional burnout among representatives of social professions. Burnout negatively affects the efficiency

and productivity of professional activities. It leads to a decrease in adaptation, the development of destructive qualities of the personality: it prevents the development of empathic abilities of teachers, promotes the development of aggressiveness. It was established that there are intra-professional differences in burnout among school teachers. However, there are few studies showing the characteristics of burnout among teachers of educational organizations at various levels. Therefore, the aim of this study was to study the phenomenon of professional burnout and its features among university professors, in comparison with school teachers and kindergarten teachers.

In an empirical study, it was found that for teachers, regardless of the category of educational organization, professional burnout is a characteristic condition that is associated with the content of the professional activity: high communicative and emotional richness, and as a result, high stress; social responsibility. Professional burnout leads to a decrease in professional efficiency, professional motivation of teachers. All components of teachers' professional burnout are associated with its level in the standard version: the higher the level of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and the lower professional efficiency, the higher the burnout index. The features of professors' professional burnout are defined, in contrast to school teachers and teachers of nursery school. So for professors, manifestations of professional burnout are characterized by the severity of all its parameters (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment.) equally. Therefore, the peculiarity of professors' professional burnout is its structural coherence and homogeneity, interconnection with the socio-demographic characteristics of teachers: length of work experience, the position.

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