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## Research Article

# Emotional Burnout in the Higher Education Teachers as a Health Risk Factor and a Cause for Leaving the Profession

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### ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** Emotional burnout occurs more often in people employed in altruistic professions, including teaching.

**Purpose:** Carry out research to identify emotional burnout in higher education teachers and its influence on their health.

**Methods:** Psychological, statistical and analytical. With the questionnaire of V. Bojko "Emotional burnout", 637 people were surveyed, including a group of 60 teachers. Data gathered were processed and analysed using descriptive and analytical statistics.

**Results:** Among teaching staff, the phase of stress was determined in every fourth teacher ( $26,6 \pm 5,7\%$ ). For  $8,3 \pm 3,5\%$  of teachers, the phase of stress was already developed, while for  $18,3 \pm 4,9\%$  of teachers it was still in development. The symptom "Reduction of professional responsibilities" was identified in half of the teachers ( $50,0 \pm 6,4\%$ ), which is 3,5 times more frequent than for the whole sample ( $14,4 \pm 0,4\%$ ),  $p < 0,05$ . The symptom "Expansion of emotion saving" was also more frequently observed in teachers:  $31,6 \pm 6,0\%$  and  $11,5 \pm 0,4\%$ ,  $p < 0,05$  respectively. Particular emphasis should be placed on the symptom "Psychosomatic and psychovegetative disorders", which was identified in every tenth examinee ( $13,3 \pm 4,3\%$  in teacher sample and  $9,7 \pm 0,3\%$  in total sample,  $p > 0,05$ ), which can affect their somatic well-being and their work capacity.

**Conclusion:** Emotional burnout should be considered as a health risk factor, especially for higher education teachers, which requires development and implementation of measures to prevent the loss of highly qualified human resources.

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### Introduction

Psychological dictionary determines burnout syndrome (from Greek „syndrome“ – concourse and English “burnout” – cessation of combustion) as a clinical disorder, first described by Freudenberg (1974). Emotional burnout is a state of physical exhaustion and disappointment, which occurs in people working in altruistic professions [1].

Teaching is one of the professional areas where emotional burnout risk is especially high. A peculiarity of higher education teacher occupation is that its organisation is complicated and has a number of interconnected

activity types, having common components. According to Z. F. Esareva, the teacher of higher education institution carries out the following types of activities: pedagogical, study and research, professional (in the primary subject), administrative, managerial, commercial and social [2].

Certainly, pedagogical, study and research activities are a priority and influence the ranking of a teacher, however, a Russian teacher devotes only around half the working hours to these. Administrative and managerial functions take a lot of time, including completion of a big number of various administrative documents (like compiling individual plans, reports on work carried out, implementation guidelines for lessons etc.). Excess formality in teachers' evaluation often hinders reaching

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their creative potential, depreciate their efforts and leads to disappointment in this professional area [3, 5, 6]. The situation is aggravated by the comparably low remuneration levels, which forces many higher education teachers to look for additional work to afford an acceptable standard of living.

## Methods

Psychological, statistical and analytical methods were used. Research of emotional burnout of higher education teachers in a medical university (Federal state budgetary educational institution of higher education „Krasnoyarsk State Medical University named after professor V.F.Voino-Yasenetsky” of the Ministry of Health of the Russian Federation) was carried out with the questionnaire of V. Bojko „Emotional burnout”, which diagnoses not only the phases of burnout syndrome development, but also individual symptoms [4]. 637 people were surveyed, including a group of 60 teachers. Data gathered were processed and analysed using descriptive and analytical statistics. Statistical significance of the differences between derived findings was determined using Student's t-test.

## Results

Analysis of the emotional burnout research results showed that stress phase is manifested in  $37,1 \pm 1,0$  % of total respondents, resistance phase in  $51,7 \pm 0,9$  % respondents and depletion phase in  $41,1 \pm 1,0$  %. It should be noted that an examinee might express two phases at once.

Among teaching staff, the phase of stress was determined in every fourth teacher ( $26,6 \pm 5,7$  %). For  $8,3 \pm 3,5$  % teachers, the phase of stress was already developed, while for  $18,3 \pm 4,9$  % teachers it was still in development.” The symptom “Experiencing psychologically traumatic circumstances” prevailed among the respondents, however, among teachers, this symptom was identified three times as often ( $33,0 \pm 6,0$  %) than in the total sample ( $11,6 \pm 0,4$ %),  $p < 0,05$ . Second most common symptom is “Anxiety and depression”:  $10,6 \pm 0,5$ % of total sample and  $13,3 \pm 4,3$ % of teachers,  $p > 0,05$ . Symptoms “Dissatisfaction with oneself” and “Cornered in a cage” were identified less often (for teachers:  $6,6 \pm 3,2$  % and  $3,3 \pm 2,3$  % accordingly, for total sample:  $7,7 \pm 0,3$ % и  $7,2 \pm 0,3$  % accordingly,  $p > 0,05$ ), however, this implies that there are members of teaching staff, who feel desperation and hopelessness to improve the situation.

Resistance phase was recorded in  $61,6 \pm 6,2$ % teachers, which is higher than in the total sample ( $51,7 \pm 0,9$  %), however, the differences are not statistically significant,  $p > 0,05$ . Formed resistance phase was determined in  $33,3 \pm 6,0$  % respondents while it was in development in  $28,3 \pm 5,8$  % respondents. The symptom “Inadequate selective emotional reaction” was identified in  $15,2 \pm 0,3$  % survey participants, 3.6 times more often in teachers ( $55,0 \pm 6,4$  %),  $p < 0,05$ .

It is necessary to emphasize the symptom “Reduction of professional responsibilities”, which was identified in half of the teachers ( $50,0 \pm 6,4$  %), which is 3,5 times more frequent than for the whole sample ( $14,4 \pm 0,4$  %)  $p < 0,05$ . The symptom “Expansion of emotion saving” is also more frequently observed in teachers:  $31,6 \pm 6,0$  % and  $11,5 \pm 0,4$  %,  $p < 0,05$  respectively.

Depletion phase was identified in  $33,3 \pm 6,0$  % teachers but does not have statistically significant differences with the total sample ( $41,1 \pm 1,0$  %),  $p > 0,05$ . The developed phase was determined in  $11,6 \pm 4,1$  % of teachers, while for  $21,7 \pm 5,3$  % it is in development. The depletion phase is burdened with decrease in general energy tone and the weakening of the nervous system. The symptoms “Emotional deficit” ( $10,1 \pm 0,3$ % in total sample and  $20,0 \pm 3,1$  % in teacher sample,  $p < 0,05$ ) and “Emotional withdrawal” ( $11,3 \pm 0,3$  % of total sample and  $11,6 \pm 4,1$  % of teacher sample,  $p > 0,05$ ) are observed. This is when the teaching staff member practically shuts down emotion from his or her professional activity and works as an automatic machine. It is in this phase that professional deformation gets established, for instance, personal detachment (depersonalisation), which amounted to  $9,9 \pm 0,4$ % of total sample and twice as high in teacher sample with  $21,6 \pm 5,3$  %,  $p < 0,05$ .

Particular emphasis should be placed on the symptom “Psychosomatic and psychovegetative disorders”, which was identified in every tenth examinee ( $13,3 \pm 4,3$  % of teacher sample and  $9,7 \pm 0,3$  % of total sample,  $p > 0,05$ ), which can affect their somatic well-being and their work capacity. A tendency for it to prevail in teachers is observed, however, the differences are not statistically significant. Potentially, through increase of the teacher sample, this tendency will be more defined.

## Discussion

What draws particular attention is a high percent of teachers in the phase of stress. Stress phase is the herald and triggering mechanism for formation of emotional burnout syndrome. In this step, a person starts to consider his or her activity as a psychologically traumatic factor, there is disappointment and dissatisfaction in his or her work, the mood worsens. This is further provoked by low remuneration, which is inadequate for the level of qualification and energy consumption.

The teaching profession becomes less prestigious in the society. Discussions during research showed that many teachers, especially over 45 years old, consider changing their principal activity. For instance, teachers of medical university with higher medical education expressed their intention to work in practical healthcare as their primary source of income, as it offers higher remuneration and more clear-determined success evaluation criteria. Therefore, it is possible that highly qualified staff leaves higher education, which would have a negative effect on training of young specialists and advanced training of personnel.

## Conclusion

Therefore, the results of the research carried out demonstrate that emotional burnout threatens a significant number of higher education teachers. Emotional burnout should be considered as a health risk factor, especially for higher education teachers, which requires development and implementation of measures to prevent the loss of highly qualified human resources.

First of all, logistical support of higher education and its staff needs a shift. This can be implemented only at the state level, because the vast majority of higher education institutions are public. In addition, certain programmes are needed for psychological support of teaching activity to

prevent emotional burnout and reduce its consequences, as well as for health preservation.

#### Conflicts of Interest

None.

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