

PROFESSIONAL BURNOUT OF THE ATHLETES PRACTISING HORSEMANSHIP

MONIKA SURAWSKA

*Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities
Lomza State University of Applied Sciences, Lomza, Poland*

E-mail: msurawska@pwsip.edu.pl

Abstract: People who perform jobs connected with giving support and helping other people are subject to stress and unfavourable emotions every day. Such chronic stressful events may lead to serious mental and physical consequences even in the most resilient individuals. Nowadays, professional burnout as a result of a highly demanding job has become an important issue. The article describes the theoretical basis related to the professional burnout, indicates preventive measures and possible management of this phenomenon.

Key words: job burnout, prevention, exhaustion, stress.

Introduction

According to the definition, to help means: “to make an effort for the benefit of another person, to make it easier for them or to back them in a difficult situation; also: give something to somebody” [1]. The action may be spontaneous or planned. This spontaneous activity, daily readiness to help others may be described as pro-social behaviour. Planned behaviour, however, entails working in a profession that requires giving support and helping the needy. Social workers, psychologists, teachers, doctors, nurses and police officers are the people who use their energy to save and help others every day. Their motivation may differ considerably and affect the quality as well as the psychological and physical consequences of their work.

A decision to choose a job with a social mission may arise from various considerations – treating helping as a profitable product, the need to maintain contact with other people, the need to feel useful and, sometimes, even a desire to have power. However, most commonly, such choices depend on specific professional and personal predispositions – great social competence, emotional intelligence, extroversion, openness, altruism and sensitivity.

Jobs connected with helping others are highly satisfying, however, much as often entail extreme stress, an intensity of unpleasant emotions related to working with people in need and, in consequence, professional burnout [2]. Sometimes it happens that, like in the saying, “the more enthusiasm at the beginning of the career, the higher the risk of burnout later on” [3]. The burnout phenomenon has become more and more common all over the world and happens regardless of gender, age, work experience, position or even occupation (not necessarily related to helping others). The research so far indicates that the burnout affects over 20% of professionals [4, 5].

Professional burnout

When taking the notion of professional burnout into consideration, it is worth mentioning the term of *professional personality deformation*. It is an unwanted consequence of a profession, which relates to the negative changes in the personality, personal growth, the mental and physical well-being. It might be referred to as *professional deformation* [6]. Numerous theories on the mechanisms of deformed personality formation can be found. Such changes in personality may result from excessive workload, excessive identification with the company and the job, fixed professional reflexes and behaviours or job routine. Very often, in the case of professional helpers, personality deformation is a consequence of *Freud's rule of abstinence* (the person who helps, supports others does not share their problems with anybody).

The burnout itself is a notion comparable to the aforementioned personality deformation, and closely resembles the notion of stress. Professional burnout as a phenomenon was first described and defined by Freudenberg in the 1970s. At first, Freudenberg used the dictionary definition of the verb “burn out” (to use up the energy, bring yourself to the point of exhaustion). He sometimes referred to the professional burnout as *professional exhaustion*. Then, with Richelson, he created the definition of professional burnout, which is as follows: “a state of fatigue and frustration as a result of devoting oneself to a cause, a lifestyle or relationship that does not yield an expected reward” [7]. In general, taking other definitions into account, professional burnout is a state of physical and psychological exhaustion [8, 9]. It is a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and minimization of one's personal achievements [2].

There are numerous reasons for professional burnout. They result from various life and professional burdens. Fenger [6] proposes the following classification:

- problems with yourself (e.g. no self-distance, too high expectations, wrong work motivation, unresolved personal issues, personality and temperamental traits);
- problems with the family and friends (e.g. pressure connected with expectations);
- problems with the clients (e.g. conflicts, exploitation, playing with emotions);
- problems with co-workers (e.g. a team that is too small or too big, lack of support, competition, envy, bad atmosphere);
- problems with the institution (e.g. over-high expectations, too many clients, bureaucracy, lack of measures for action, lack of institutional support – supervision, job routine, lack of clear working guidance).

Moreover, important factors conducive to professional burnout are surely a lack of success at work and a loss of hope for any achievement or change, low income and poor working conditions.

When analysing professional burnout, it is useful to draw attention to the dynamics of the phenomenon. Maslach [10] enlists three components of professional burnout:

1. emotional exhaustion (emptiness, lack of energy due to excessive internal and external demands);
2. depersonalisation (impersonality);
3. poor evaluation of one's professional achievements (a feeling of wasting time and effort).

Under the influence of a stressful job, the emotional exhaustion increases, attempts to deal with the problem end in depersonalisation and, as a result of depersonalisation and feedback from the environment, the sense of personal achievements deteriorates. However, it is worth remembering that the burnout may not develop according to this theoretical model, if only because of the relation between the personal predispositions and the occurrence and duration of particular phases. The phases may intermingle or appear at once. Within the phases, different symptoms of the burnout may arise, from irritation, lack of interest in the job, through unwillingness to live, dehumanisation, immunological system disorders or serious psychological and physical problems [6].

Take care of yourself – take preventive measures and react quickly.

When performing any job, a person should be guided not only by the need to be effective, but also by self care and

safety. In order to prevent the burnout, it is of importance to take care of one's psychological and physical comfort as well as being particularly alert to any burnout symptoms that may arise. Already in the 1980s, Kaslov and Schulman [11] described a number of easily recognisable burnout symptoms. From among the symptoms, they distinguished the unwillingness to go to work, lack of involvement in the work tasks, being exhausted with life and seeing only its negative aspects, nervousness, irritation, frequent illnesses with no apparent reasons or even willingness to escape or commit suicide. Subsequent burnout stages are accompanied by specific symptoms, which reflect the advancement of the problem and offer prospects for dealing with it. Stage I is only a warning. The feelings that appear are despondency, apathy as well as irritation. They are accompanied by immunological system disorders like infections or migraines. What is also characteristic are insomnia and lack of appetite. At this stage, it is often enough to reduce the workload or introduce a new element that could break the routine.

When the early burnout symptoms are not recognised and a chronic state described in stage I is developed, the burnout will aggravate and new symptoms will appear (stage II) – avoiding contacts with people, depreciation of oneself and one's work, disdainful attitude, cynicism. Intervention at stage II is more difficult, but still possible – a longer holiday, asking for co-workers' help in relieving work overload and a general social support. In this case, not taking any action will lead to the last stage III that can last for weeks or even months. Apart from aggravation of symptoms from stages I and II, the problems with cognitive functioning may arise and personality structure may be out of balance. People at this stage become confrontational, aggressive and, very often, do not accept help. The problems get transferred to personal life (partnership, family problems). Psychosomatic symptoms aggravate. At this stage, medical contact (often pharmacological treatment like for patients with depression) and frequently a change of job may become unavoidable [6].

An important aspect in the fight against the burnout is prevention. The use of stress management techniques (relaxation – visualisation, progressive and autogenic training, breathing training), appreciation of and expression through art, self rewarding, a hobby, social support, finding priorities at work and in private life, balance between professional and family life.

It is worth limiting the number of clients at work, ensuring that the workplace looks friendly and the atmosphere is nice. One should not refrain from asking for help or support.

It is also possible to verify whether one is prone to professional burnout by means of psychotests available online

(an example below) or by visiting a psychologist. The tests that are used in psychological diagnosis are: MBI (Maslach Burnout Inventory) or LBQ (Link Burnout Questionnaire) by Santinello [12].

Test – Are you susceptible to professional burnout?

Carefully analyse the last 10 months of your life. Have you noticed any changes in you or your environment? Answer the questions by indicating a number between 1 (no or few changes) to 5 (many changes). Treat the number as the degree of change that you have noticed. Sum up and check the result.

1. Do you get tired easier? Are you exhausted, low on energy?
2. Do you get irritated by people who tell you: “You haven’t looked too good recently”?
3. Does your workload increase, but your efficiency/ performance decrease?
4. Do you feel more cynical and disillusioned?
5. Do you often feel melancholic and depressed for no clear reason?
6. Do you sometimes forget about appointments, bills, personal matters?
7. Are you more irritated and react impulsively to the people around you?
8. Do you see your family and friends less often?
9. Are you too busy to regularly read reports, answer calls or send greeting cards?
10. Do you suffer from physical conditions (muscle pain, headache, persistent cold)?
11. Do you feel lost/defeated after a whole day of work?
12. Do you have the impression that you don’t feel joy or happiness anymore?
13. Are you not willing to accept jokes about you?
14. Does sexual activity seem a rather harmful exertion than a source of joy?
15. Do you feel like you don’t have anything to say to other people?

If your score is:

- 1 – 25 everything is ok
- 26 – 35 you should draw attention to some of the aspects of your life
- 36 – 50 you are a candidate for burnout
- 51 – 65 you are experiencing burnout
- 66 – 75 critical point – your mental and physical health is in danger!

Source: <https://stressfree.pl> [13]

Conclusion

Professional burnout is a symptom of chronic stress at work [14], which results from both internal and external expectations and workload. A lack of decisive action to mitigate the arising symptoms of burnout may result in disastrous consequences for the mental and physical health as well as for the environment, family and friends, the company we work for. To improve the quality of life and working conditions, it is often enough to go for a short holiday or change the décor in the office. Equally often, the only solution is to change occupation. Nevertheless, it is still not an excessive price to pay for our health.

Helping others does not have to be a struggle, it can be a source of strength. It can affect our lives in a positive way and we can get energy from smiles of others to use it in our work with the next people that need our help.

Literature

- [1] www.sjp.pwn.pl.
- [2] Gerrig R.J., Zimbardo Ph. G. *Psychologia i życie*. PWN, Warszawa, 2011.
- [3] Kuc B.R., Moczydłowska J.M. *Zachowania organizacyjne*. Difin, page 113, Warszawa, 2009.
- [4] Maslach C., Leiter M.P. *Prawda o wypaleniu zawodowym. Co zrobić ze stresem w organizacji*. Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa, 2011.
- [5] Tucholska S. Wypalenie zawodowe w ujęciu strukturalnym i dynamicznym. http://www.kul.pl/files/37/www/Wypalenie_materialy.doc.
- [6] Fengler J. *Pomaganie mężczyznom. Wypalenie w pracy zawodowej*. GWP, Gdańsk, 2001.
- [7] Pines A.M. *Wypalenie – w perspektywie egzystencjalnej*, chapter Wypalenie zawodowe. Przyczyny i zapobieganie., pages 32–57. Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa, 2011.
- [8] Emener W.G., Luck R.S., Gohs F.X. A theoretical investigation of the construct burnout. *Journal of Rehabilitation Administration*, 6(4):188–196, 1982.
- [9] Znańska-Kozłowska K. Wypalenie zawodowe – pojęcie, przyczyny, objawy. *Zeszyty Naukowe Wyższej Szkoły Humanitas. Zarządzanie*, (1):105–113, 2013.
- [10] Maslach Ch. *Wypalenie – w perspektywie wielowymiarowej*, chapter Wypalenie zawodowe. Przyczyny, mechanizmy, zapobieganie., pages 13–31. Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa, 2000.
- [11] Kaslow S.W., Schulman N. How to be sane and happy as a family therapist or the reciprocal impact of family therapy teaching and practice and therapists personal lives and mental health. *Journal of Psychotherapy and Family*, 3(2):79–96, 1987.

- [12] Pracowania Testów Psychologicznych PTP.
www.practest.pl.
- [13] [https:// stressfree.pl](https://stressfree.pl).
- [14] Kraczlą M. Wypalenie zawodowe jako efekt długotrwałego stresu. *Zeszyty Naukowe Wyższej Szkoły Humanitas. Zarządzanie*, (2):69–81, 2013.

Received: 2017

Accepted: 2017