

PROFESSIONAL BURNOUT SYNDROME AMONG FEMALE TEACHING STAFF IN LATVIA

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Abstract: *During the pandemic and war in Ukraine, the issue of teaching staff burnout has become very topical. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the level of burnout of teachers and lecturers and to find out how age, work place and seniority are correlating with level of burn out. To achieve the goal, the questionnaire was developed based on MBI-NL-ES burnout inventory (n=185). It was concluded that Latvian teachers are under high burnout syndrome, especially those who are working in primary and secondary schools from 10 to 15 years.*

Keywords: *burnout, teaching staff, exhaustion, depersonalization, personal accomplishment*

ANALITIC REVIEW

During the last decade, the issue of employee burnout has become very topical in the work environment. As some authors point out, especially staff who constantly work with other people, solving their problems and experiencing their negative emotions, have a high threshold for burnout - as Maslach C. noted, professionals working in human services (e.g., nurses, physicians, social workers, and teachers) are vulnerable to burnout [1]. One of the reasons can be, that teachers are starting their position with vision of making significant contribution to children and society and then are shocked by the contrast between their expectations and real life in the classroom, which leads as Gold Y. mentioned “to severe disillusionments which, in effect, is burnout” [15]. During the pandemic and war in Ukraine the level of stress has significantly increased, negatively affecting student-teacher relationships.

In recent years, several studies have been conducted around the world on the burnout syndrome of teaching staff. Meeting the expectations of students and the rest of the agents involved (society, companies, public administrations, etc.) significantly increases the pressure on the higher education system. [12] In Latvia, the situation was complicated by some other factors: the resignation of many teachers who were not vaccinated against COVID19; school reform SCHOOL 2030, which develops a new competency approach in learning content and caused extensive discussions, teacher resistance and increased workload; additional tests and exams in Latvian for Russian-speaking teachers. All these factors caused some teachers to leave the job and increased the workload of the remaining teachers. Also, in higher education, the amendments to the law adopted in 2021, which initiated the reform of higher education institutions, as well as the closure or merger of several higher education institutions, contributed to the increase in the administrative workload of teaching staff and uncertainty about the future.

Survey of Medellin University in Colombia examined 89 professors and results showed, that 41,6% of the professors were located among “much” (22,5%) and “extreme” (19,1%) level of burnout [4]. Survey made by the American Federation of



Teachers shows, that in 2015 34% of respondents noted that their mental health was “not good” for 7 or more of the past 30 days, but in 2017 that number increased to 58% [2]. Other research shows, how the stress of teacher affects students’ outcomes: stress and depression symptoms of teacher are linked to low student achievement gains and vice versa – higher teacher engagement predicted higher student engagement [3].

Several studies report on the relevance of age and experience in the study of burnout among teachers [13, 14]. According to Spanish researchers, in contest of influencing level of burnout by teachers the most repeated among the publications were demographic variables like gender (91,43%), age (77,14%) and teaching experience (34,29%) [5]. Some studies show a significant relation between burnout and type of school: burnout seems to be more prevalent among secondary than among primary school teachers. Gold Y. [15] argued that secondary school teachers are more burned out because, compared with students from primary schools, secondary school students are less interested and more difficult to motivate. In several studies [13, 14] it was found that full-time teachers report higher scores on emotional exhaustion than part-time teachers.

There are several studies that examine the correlation between gender of teaching staff and its burnout level. Some studies reported that female staff showed higher emotional exhaustion than male colleagues (Maslach et al., 1996; Lackritz, 2004; Purvanova and Muros, 2010). But meta-analysis of 183 studies on the correlation between gender and burnout conducted by Purvanova and Muros [8] rejected the idea that females suffer from burnout more than men. In according to Purvanova and Muros’s results, women have emotional exhaustion slightly more than men, while men suffer from depersonalization more than women, which also has been proven in research of Lackritz (2004). Lackritz [7] revealed also that only in personal accomplishment there were no gender-based differences. By measuring burnout by female teachers, different researchers pointed out different results: if by Maslach [6], Lackritz [7] and Purvanova, Muros [8] results report about the high level of emotional exhaustion in female teachers, then in research of Moscow State university, the female teachers were characterized by a high level of depersonalization in the first place, the emotional exhaustion is on the second place [9]. On the other hand, there are many studies showed that in general gender has no an effect on burnout level of these teachers [10, 11], that also reported no significant differences between male and female burnout levels.

PURPOSE AND METHODOLOGY

This paper is focused on the problem of professional burnout of female teachers in Latvia on all educational levels – starting from primary school to the universities. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the level of burnout of teachers and lecturers and to examine the burnout levels in correlation with 3 socio-demographic factors: seniority, age and type of educational institution (primary, secondary school, HEI). At the moment, there are controversial results in surveys describing the influence of experience and age on the burnout phenomenon.

Three empirical hypotheses were formed:

H1: The indicators of burnout level as emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and personal accomplishment in teaching staff of HEI are less than by school teachers.

H2: The indicators of burnout level as emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and personal accomplishment would increase with the age and the seniority of teaching.

H3: Teachers working in more than 1 workplace, have higher burnout level.

The most widely accepted conceptualization of burnout is found in the work of Maslach and Jackson [6]. They consider burnout as a symptom of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment and developed their self-report questionnaire based on these three dimensions. In the 1996 the MBI was first used for teaching staff and since that Maslach inventory being adopted by different researchers and countries – from Netherlands [18,19] to Brazil [17], Colombia [4] and Russia [16].

To achieve the goal of the study the MBI-NL-ES tool was used, which was adapted in 1998 by scientists from Netherlands to the specifics of teaching staff. The Dutch MBI-NL-ES differs from the MBI in that 1 question from the section Personal accomplishment and 1 question from the section Emotional exhaustion were removed based on research data, and the depersonalization block was supplemented with 2 new questions [18].

The survey was conducted online on google.com platform and respondents voluntarily participated in this study. Part of the respondents (n=138) were invited to participate in the survey during the public seminar, dedicated to the burnout among teachers, hold on 15.12.2023 in zoom, where more than 400 teachers and lecturers from different places of Latvia took part. After an additional invitation for participation was sent to HEI teachers from contact list of EKA University of Sciences (n=51). Anonymity of participants and confidentiality of information were ensured, and they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time. The data was only used for the research purpose. 189 female respondents were achieved and 185 individuals' responses were used for analyses (4 responses were submitted by individuals, who are working only in informal education and were removed from analyzed sample).

RESULTS

The sample was comprised of 185 female teachers. The average age of respondents is between 40 and 59 years, 36% working in primary, 51% in secondary and 13% in higher education. 54% of respondents has more than 20 years seniority and 34% have more than one workplace.

More than half teachers with higher seniority are working in primary school and only one quarter of staff with seniority more than 20 years (26%) are working in HEI. Only in HEI there are more than 73% of staff working in several workplaces at one time.



Table 1. Demographic characteristics by type of educational institution

| | Total sample n = 185 | Primary education n=67 | Secondary education n=95 | HEI n=23 |
|--------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------|
| Age | | | | |
| Till 39 | 30 | 9 | 16 | 5 |
| 40-49 | 65 | 30 | 24 | 10 |
| 50-59 | 59 | 29 | 36 | 8 |
| Over 60 | 31 | 9 | 18 | 4 |
| Seniority | | | | |
| Less than 1 year | 25 | 9 | 14 | 2 |
| 5 -9 years | 23 | 6 | 13 | 4 |
| 10 – 15 years | 16 | 6 | 6 | 4 |
| 16-19 years | 20 | 7 | 6 | 7 |
| More than 20 years | 101 | 39 | 56 | 6 |
| Work places | | | | |
| One work place | 122 | 53 | 63 | 6 |
| More work places | 63 | 14 | 32 | 17 |

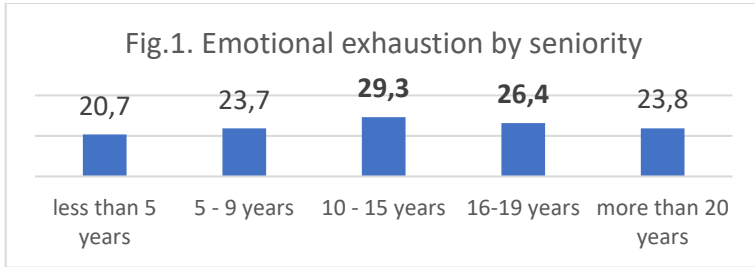
To calculate the level of burnout, 3 separate scores were calculated for each participant by summing their responses on subscales of emotional exhaustion score (range 0–54), of depersonalization score (range 0–30) and of the score of personal accomplishment (range 0–48). The normative table for working with MBI-NL-ES was used [20].

Table 2. Normative scores to calculate level of burnout with the Maslach Burnout Inventory

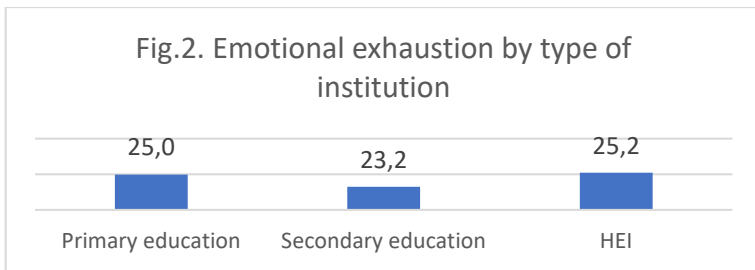
| Levels of burnout | Emotional exhaustion | Depersonalization | Personal accomplishment |
|-------------------------|----------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|
| Low burnout | < 17 | < 5 | > 40 |
| Moderate burnout | 18–29 | 6–11 | 34–39 |
| High burnout | > 30 | > 12 | < 33 |

From the analyses of the MBI-NL-ES, it is concluded that, on average, Latvian female academic workforce is in the zone of increased burnout syndrome. Only in the score of Emotional exhaustion the average is 24, which means moderated burn out (normative score 18-29), in both other scores the average is in high burnout area.

In order to investigate the correlation of teacher burnout level with sociodemographic characteristics, in-depth data processing in each score of burnout was performed.

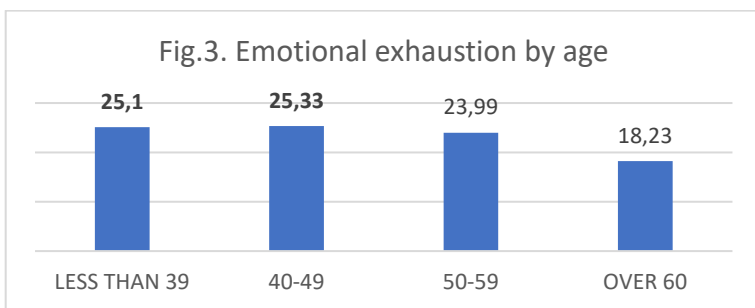


By correlating the seniority and the emotional exhaustion, the higher level of burnout by emotional exhaustion have those teachers, who are working in the field 10 to 15 year and they are very near to high burnout. All other categories of seniority are in the moderated level of burnout.



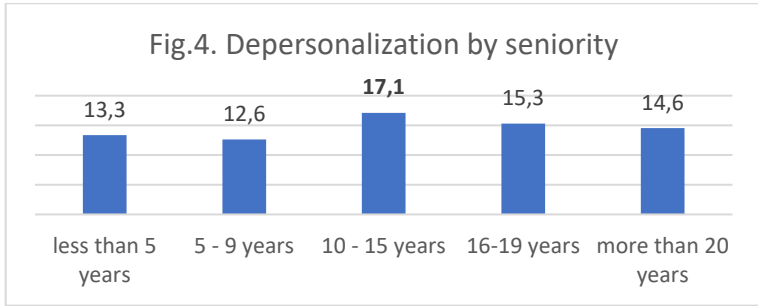
By correlating the type of educational institution teachers are working, figure 2 shows that there is no significant difference between the type of institution and level of burnout by emotional exhaustion – all of types are in the same group, moderated burnout.

The Figure 3 shows that oldest teachers are on the bottom of moderate burnout, closely to low burnout, while middle aged teachers are showing the moderate burnout.



As analyses of emotional exhaustion score shows, highest level of burnout is experiences by young to middle aged female teaching staff (till 49 years), working in primary school or HEI for 10 to 20 years.

In the score of depersonalization, in general it is a high burnout with average of 14,4 (normative score > 12).



As a Figure 4 shows the highest level of depersonalization is by staff worked in education 10 to 15 years, the lowest, which still is in high burnout segment, is by staff worked 5 to 9 years.

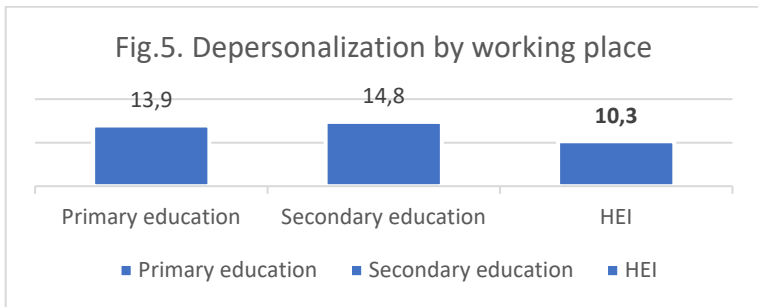


Figure 5 shows the level of depersonalization by working place: the teachers in primary and secondary school are under high level of burnout, while teacher of HEIs are in the moderated burnout segment.

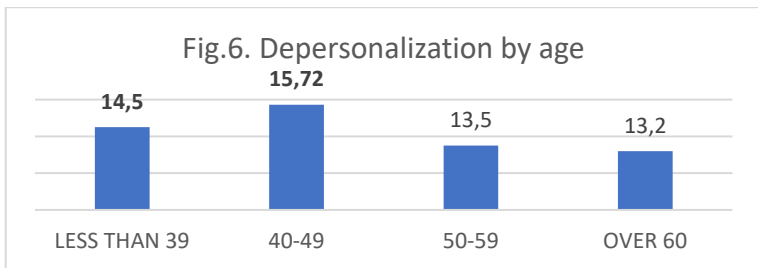
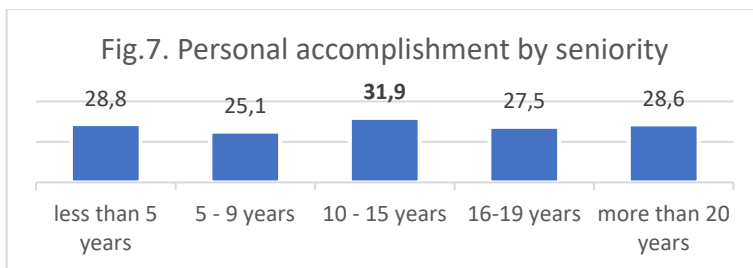


Figure 6 show the all teachers are under high level of burnout in depersonalization segment, but the oldest group shows the lowest rate.

In the scale of personal accomplishment, it is a high burnout with average of 27,8 (normative score < 33).



As showed in Figure 7, all seniority groups are under high level of burnout in segment of personal accomplishment, but the highest numbers also here are by seniority from 10 to 15 years.

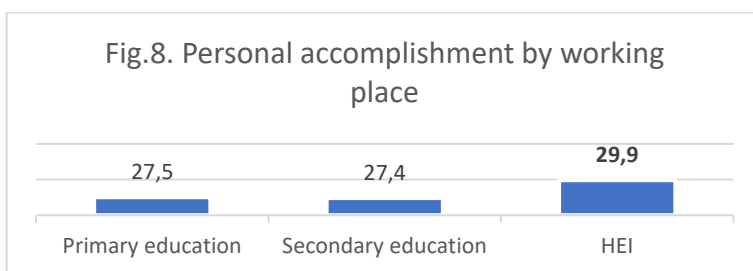
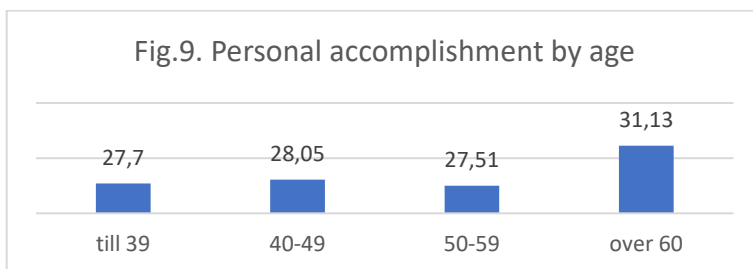


Figure 8 shows that closest to the moderated burnout level are HEI teachers, while school teachers are on high burnout level.

In the Figure 9 is showed that the highest level of burnout in personal accomplishment have teachers over 60, but all groups are in the high burnout level.



The lowest level of burnout in 2 scores showed the teachers of HEI - 10,3 by depersonalization, which means moderated burnout, and 29,9 by personal accomplishment.

The table shows that the teachers, who worked 10 to 15 years, mostly in primary and secondary education and in age from 40 to 49 years are mostly at highest burnout level. Persons, who have just one workplace are showing higher emotional exhaustion and depersonalization and lower personal accomplishment.



TABLE 3. Burnout level correlations with different socio-demographic variables

| | Emotional exhaustion | Depersonalization | Personal accomplishment |
|------------------------------|----------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|
| Seniority | | | |
| Less than 5 years | 20,7 | 13,3 | 28,8 |
| 5 to 9 years | 23,7 | 12,6 | 25,1 |
| 10 to 15 years | 29,3 | 17,1 | 31,9 |
| 15 to 20 years | 26,4 | 15,3 | 27,5 |
| More than 20 years | 23,8 | 14,6 | 28,6 |
| Type of working place | | | |
| Primary education | 25 | 13,9 | 27,5 |
| Secondary education | 23,2 | 14,8 | 27,4 |
| HEI | 25,2 | 10,3 | 29,9 |
| Age | | | |
| Till 39 | 25,1 | 14,5 | 27,7 |
| 40-49 | 25,3 | 15,7 | 28,05 |
| 50-59 | 24 | 13,5 | 27,5 |
| Over 60 | 18,2 | 13,2 | 31,3 |
| Workplaces | | | |
| One | 24,8 | 14,7 | 28,04 |
| More than one | 22,7 | 14 | 29,02 |

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This study shows burnout syndrome experienced by teachers and professors of different schools and universities in Latvia. In general, both, teachers at schools and academis staff of HEIs reported moderate to high level of burnout, with emotional exhaustion at a medium level and depersonalization and personal accomplishment at a high burnout level.

Overall, HEI staff reported lower level of depersonalization and more personal accomplishment as teachers working in primary and secondary schools, which partially confirms the first hypothesis H1. However, for the further studies these results should be carefully analyzed, because they do not discriminate by HEI teacher's type of contract – as some authors pointed out, there can be differences between permanent and occasional staff [2]. It should be improved, do the permanent professors, who spend more time in the faculty, would be the ones with higher risk of having the burnout syndrome or are that the adjunct professor's due to simultaneous jobs in different institutions and job instability.

The specificity of sample of this study is determined by the fact that there are only female teachers. Also, the limitations of the study should be considered, because probably the teachers with a higher level of burn out syndrome were more reluctant to respond to the questionnaire. The leading factor affecting the overall burnout of female teachers in Latvia is depersonalization with 14,4 (by the normative score >12). The result supports the previous research findings by Tikhonova and coauthors [9], where the female teachers were also characterized by a high level of depersonalization in the first place. The results are in opposite to research of Maslach [6], Lackritz [7], Purvanova and Muros [8] about the high level of emotional exhaustion in female teachers. It can be explained by the specific of common past of teachers from Latvia and Russia, who mostly are in age after 40, which is sharply different from the experience of Western people as well as different social status and salary level in

Western and Post-soviet countries. For further studies the level of burnout could be compared in post-socialistic countries, to find out the similarities or differences.

During the study, the second hypothesis that indicators of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and personal accomplishment would increase with the age and the seniority of teaching experience was confirmed to be the opposite. This result is consistent with that of the previous research findings by van Ginkel [14], Friedman [13] and Tikhonova and coauthors [9]. Regarding emotional exhaustion results of this study were consistent with the results of Mukundan and Mahboobeh [10] and Tikhonova and coauthors [9], that elderly women teachers suffered less emotional exhaustion.

The third hypothesis, that teachers working in more than 1 workplace, have higher burnout level, was confirmed: teachers, who had only one workplace, had higher level on emotional exhaustion (24,8 to 22,7) and depersonalization (14,7 to 14) and also showed the lower rate of personal accomplishment (28,04 to 29,02). This correlate with studies of van Ginkel [14] and Friedman [13], who found out that full-time teachers report higher scores on emotional exhaustion than part-time teachers.

The further analysis could point out the relevance of health-promoting strategies among academic teachers, which would be aimed for reducing the workload and promoting practices that facilitate the regeneration of personal resources (recovering and length of vacation, sleep hygiene, workload redistribution and so on) as well as differences of burnout level between permanent and adjunct staff. The results can be used by social, school and educational psychologists, as well as by HEI and school management for the prevention and correction of professional burnout of teaching staff.

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