

Assessment of Burnout syndrome in university teachers

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ABSTRACT

The teaching profession is considered by the International Labour Organization (ILO) as one of the most stressful as it is an activity that involves intense contact between people. Thus, an incidence of elements that lead to burnout syndrome is increasingly evident in these professionals. The aim of this study was to evaluate the burnout syndrome among professors of undergraduate health courses. The teachers at health courses at University of Western Sao Paulo were invited to enroll the research. After they given the written informed consent, it was applied two instruments to data collect. The data were analyzed on a statistical software with Pearson's correlation at 5% significance level. It was interviewed 72 professors, of whom 48 (66,7%) were male, and 24 (33,3%) were female. According to the dimensions of Burnout Syndrome, the most outstanding was Emotional Exhaustion. The variables that showed significance in the Pearson's correlation were: the number of courses the professors teach ($p = 0.0012$) and the number of students with whom they have daily contact ($p = 0.0463$) within the emotional exhaustion dimension; and age ($p = 0.0319$) and working time ($p = 0.0082$) within the dimension of Professional Effectiveness. Results identified a low index in all dimensions, but there was a statistical association between the dimensions of emotional exhaustion and professional efficacy with the sociodemographic variables.

Descriptors: Faculty. Higher Education. Stress, Psychological. Burnout. Professional.

1 INTRODUCTION

The work has a fundamental meaning in structuring the identity of the individual. It is through him that people have the possibility of

realization, of express competence and social integration¹. For many individuals, the work environment is the major contributor to the development of stress², because, in order to keep

up with technological advances, this environment has undergone numerous changes³ that increase its self-critical potential, tasks, thus forcing workers to adapt to such¹.

The World Health Organization says that it is a global epidemic that, in excess, can harm the individual's biopsychosocial well-being, causing: insomnia, fatigue, irritability, anxiety and even depression². Such symptoms may increase an individual's likelihood of developing behavioral problems¹.

There are evidences that chronic occupational stress progress to a syndromic condition, called Burnout⁴⁻⁶. The term Burnout suggests that something stopped working due to exhaustion, physical, psychological and emotional exhaustion caused by the disharmony between the individual and his environment^{1,7}.

The most used definition of Burnout accepted by the scientific community is based on the social-psychological perspective, being understood as a process and constituted by three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, characterized by lack or lack of energy and a feeling of emotional exhaustion that according to Maslach and Leiter⁹ leads the individual not to supply as requirements that are made at work harming his emotional and consequently, an accomplishment of daily activities; depersonalization, defined as the lack of sensitivity and hardness in responding to the people who are recipients of this service, according to Gil-Monte and Peiró¹⁰, the individual acts cynically and dehumanized; and the low professional achievement, which refers to a decrease in the feelings of competence regarding the personal gains obtained in working with people¹¹.

Professionals who maintain a constant and direct relationship with others¹² over a period of excessive effort, with very small recovery intervals, such as firefighters, police officers, health professionals and teachers², are more

likely to experience prolonged exhaustion and decreased interest in their work activities⁸.

Some of the symptoms that individuals with Burnout Syndrome may present are frustration, anger, fear, anxiety, and inability to feel happiness, pleasure, and contentment. Physical symptoms such as insomnia, muscle tension, headaches and gastrointestinal problems can be associated with this, as well as abuse of alcohol and medication, increasing family problems and social conflicts¹³.

International Labour Organization considers the teaching profession as one of the most stressful with a strong incidence of elements that lead to Burnout Syndrome¹⁴.

Such disease directly interferes with the teaching and learning relationship, since it damages the teachers' condition to relate to their students and their peers, which impacts the quality of pedagogical work^{8,15}, impairing the teacher's creative capacity, increasing their work leave and diminishing their motivation and zeal. Some teachers, who spend many time denigrating students complaining about the institution's administration and students' relatives, regretting their professional choice or planning new work options, demonstrate behaviors indicative of Burnout symptoms¹³.

The syndrome is not a new event¹⁶. What is perhaps new is the challenge of this professional category to identify and declare the signs and symptoms presented by the disease¹³.

Therefore, insofar as we can understand this psychosocial phenomenon as a process, identifying its stages and dimensions, its most important stressors and its explanatory models, we can predict actions that can prevent, mitigate or stop Burnout, thus helping teachers to improve their quality of personal and professional life and continue to carry out your life project.

The aim of this study was to evaluate the burnout syndrome among professors of

undergraduate health courses.

2 METHODOS

The present study was exploratory, descriptive and cross sectional. Professors of the courses of Dentistry, Medicine, Nutrition, Biomedicine, Physiotherapy, Nursing, Pharmacy and Speech Therapy of a private university in the state of Sao Paulo, representing a total of 200 teachers were invited to participate. The Research Ethics Committee from the University of Western Sao Paulo approved this research. Participation was voluntary, after the signing of the Term of Free and Informed Consent, ensuring the anonymity of the teachers.

The data were collected with two self-applied instruments. The first one, a form containing questions about sociodemographic data and teaching activities, seeking to identify the profile of teachers. The variables were: age, sex, marital status, children, number of students who have in contact per day, number of courses in which they teach, accumulation of jobs, work time dedicated to teaching, number of hours worked per day and participation in cores/collegiate.

The second, an inventory already validated, called the Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educators Survey (MBI-ES)¹⁷, which is composed of 22 questions subdivided to identify the three dimensions of Burnout syndrome: emotional exhaustion (EE), depersonalization (DP), and professional efficacy (PE).

The 22 items of the MBI-ES inventory are measured by a Likert-type frequency scale, ranging from 0 to 6, being 0 (never), 1 (sometimes a year), 2 (once a month or less), 3 (Sometimes during the month), 4 (once a week), 5 (sometimes during the week) and 6 (every day).

The questions seek to investigate the impressions of teachers regarding statements related to the stress caused by the daily routine of

work, such as the willingness to work and influence positively other people, wear and tear due to daily work and task overload, professional relationship between colleagues and students and the psychological and emotional impact of the daily work routine, which must be answered considering the frequency with which they occur. From the answers, the questions related to each dimension are separated, and the scores are summed.

This inventory was based on the Maslach Burnout Inventory, designed for a variety of occupations, and adapted for Burnout research into teachers. An initial aspect of the syndrome, detected by the instrument is emotional exhaustion, identified by the sensation of fatigue. When this picture becomes chronic, the feeling arises that it is no longer possible to dispense students with the same commitment that was once dispensed with. Thus, teachers begin to be unable to have positive feelings about their students, and with that, they begin to experience the second component of the syndrome, depersonalization. The third aspect is crucial to the teaching profession as most teachers enter this area to collaborate on student growth and learning. Once they feel that they cannot achieve this goal, they can devote themselves to other activities, seeking such a reward¹⁷.

According to the scores of each dimension identified by the MBI-ES instrument, high scores on EE and DP and low scores on PE indicate a high Burnout level¹⁸. Data were analyzed using the BIOESTAT 5.3¹⁹ statistical program. The Pearson correlation test was applied at a significance level of 5%.

3 RESULTS

In the present study, 72 teachers (36%) accepted to participate, of which 48 (66.7%) were male and 24 (33.3%) were female. The most prevalent marital status was married (46 -

63.9%), followed by single (18 - 25%), divorced (7 - 9.72%) and widowed (1 -1.39%). The most common place of work, together with the educational institution, was the private practice (28 - 38.9%), hospital (9 - 12.5%) and other places (8 - 11.11%).

Table 1 shows the mean and standard deviation of the three dimensions of Burnout Syndrome, which shows low EE (once a month or less), DP and low EP (sometimes a year or less).

Table 2 shows the correlation between sociodemographic variables and dimensions of Burnout Syndrome. The average age was 43.39

years, having as minimum age 24 and maximum age 67 years.

The variables that demonstrated statistical significance in the correlation with Burnout levels were the number of courses that the teacher teaches and the number of students with whom he / she has daily contact within the dimension of emotional exhaustion; the age and the working time within the dimension of professional effectiveness. results identified a low index in all dimensions, however, there was a significance and association between the dimensions of emotional exhaustion and professional efficacy with the sociodemographic variables

Table 1. Mean and standard deviation of three dimensions of Burnout syndrome

Dimension	N	Mean	Standard deviation
Emotional Exhaustion	72	1.80	1.65
Depersonalization	72	0.84	0.92
Profissionnal Efficacy	72	1.09	0.83

Tabela 2. Correlation of sociodemographic features of the teachers according the three dimensions of Burnout Syndrome

Variables	N	Mean	s	EE		DP		PE	
				r	p	r	p	r	p
Age	72	43.39	10.78	0.0909	0.4478	-0.0128	0.9149	-0.2531	0.0319*
Childres	72	1.33	1.08	0.0560	0.6404	0.0412	0.7309	-0.0319	0.7905
Number of years that teacher teaches	72	15.73	11.31	0.1135	0.3425	-0.1081	0.3662	-0.3093	0.0082*
Number of courses that the teacher teaches	72	1.97	1.42	0.3740	0.0012*	0.0911	0.4464	0.0725	0.5451
Number of hours worked per day	70	7.23	2.68	0.2280	0.0576	-0.1089	0.3695	0.0904	0.4568
Number of students with whom he / she has daily contact within	70	76.18	57.26	0.2390	0.0463*	0.0991	0.4143	-0.1064	0.3804
Participation in cores/collegiate	72	1.80	1.69	0.1360	0.2546	-0.1191	0.3191	-0.0766	0.5224

s –standard deviation; r – correlation’s coefficient; *p<0.05

4 DISCUSSION

The results obtained in the present study showed the possibilities of Burnout syndrome being in process in the studied population, considering that the dimension with the highest average score was EE (1.80). According to the models of Carlotto and Palazzo¹⁵, Maslach²⁰ and Azeem²¹, the EE dimension is the pioneer of the developmental process of the syndrome followed by the dimension of DP and finally the PE. However, according to the results of this study, in the continuity is firstly the PE and finally the DP, which indicates that the development of the disease may be being contained by the professional feeling of accomplishment of the individuals.

It is believed that the teacher being older and having a longer working time may feel diminished in personal achievement at work, which was confirmed by this study when we observed the correlation of relevance present in the dimension PE. When we evaluate the dimensions of age and working time, the study population is mostly in the 40-50 age group and has a great deal of professional experience, being one of the main indications that encourage us to train professionals. More experienced patients are less likely to develop Burnout Syndrome, according to Friedmann²² and Carlotto and Palazzo¹⁵. This can be explained by the long period in which the professional develops his services in the institution, where he is already accustomed to the norms, values and objectives of the place and has adequate managerial support, participation in group decisions and organizational goals, which implies directly in the satisfaction of their interests, increasing the desire to belong to such environment and promoting the reduction of their emotional exhaustion, resulting in an emotional stability that generates health.

The working time was statistically

significant within the PE dimension. This leads us to infer that the greater the experience of the professional with the teaching work, the greater his feeling of satisfaction with his work. In contrast, the younger the teacher, the greater the sense of distance between people with whom they have to relate in the work environment. Generally, the beginning of their careers is marked by too much enthusiasm and dedication, judging the social meaning of their work, in which they seek and imagine that it will provide great personal satisfaction.

However, such difficulties as pressure, vulnerability of teaching, personal interaction and social values are factors that trigger exhaustion and feelings of frustration, generating questions about the choice of profession, thus establishing the relationship that young teachers are exposed to a greater risk of developing Burnout. According to Sousa, Mendonça and Zanin²³, the greater the affective commitment to the organization, the teacher develops less possibilities of causing Burnout. This confirms the results of previous studies which showed that younger teachers have greater emotional exhaustion^{14,24,25} and greater depersonalization²⁶. The study by Rosa and Carlotto²⁷ shows that this happens due to the lack of experience in dealing with problematic situations, the excessive expectation in relation to the profession and the difficulty in dealing with the demand for work.

According to Servilha²⁸, exhaustion is a strong influence that converges on the relation of the teacher and his work, being able to be the trigger of the feeling of apathy and discouragement and thus, to leverage the difficulty to glimpse strategies that take up the motivation, leisure and health, compromising the relationship with students and the construction and socialization of knowledge.

The low index of DP may be associated with the content of the questionnaire, since some

issues may have an impact, since they contradict the "expected" posture of a good professional, as suggested by Carlotto and Palazzo¹⁵, Benevides Pereira²⁹ and Carlotto³⁰. In order to avoid revealing unwanted or uncorrected attitudes, some teachers may find it difficult to be completely truthful in their responses, making it difficult to identify DP issues. In addition, some individuals may find it difficult to identify what is happening to themselves³¹.

Within the dimensions of EE and PE, the teacher feels exhausted as a result of work reinforces the personal sense of accomplishment and the professional feels more valued and reinforced together by the directive body, which begins to observe dedication and commitment of the professional with the institutional goals and targets, and this is a strategy that seeks greater productivity within organizations^{15,30}. Whereas, both exhaustion and low professional efficacy may discourage teachers from understanding the merits of activities and methods that will teach students, affecting the quality of teaching and learning. Learning, leading them to low autonomy in teaching because of low autonomous motivation^{32,33}.

The significant variables, such as the number of courses in which the teacher teaches and the number of students that come into daily contact, are contained in the EE dimension. This may have been influenced by the possible factors: high number of students in the classroom, workload (related to the commitment and responsibility to teach in various courses) and, by the professional's sense of perceiving and submitting to stress factors at work, In agreement with Carlotto and Palazzo¹⁵, Keller et al.³⁴ and David and Quintão³⁵. Such stresses are related to student misbehavior, which generates an increase in the intensity of negative emotions as a consequence of disturbing episodes in the classroom; The lack of participation of teachers

in decision making; And the great expectation of family members about the teaching work, influencing the lower individual satisfaction.

The demographic variables related to gender and children, did not present significant statistical differences with the dimensions of Burnout, which corroborates with the studies of Carlotto and Palazzo¹⁵ and partially with Koruklu et al²⁵, which did not identify the predictive power of the several in association with the syndrome of burnout, stating that it does not encompass the individual problem, but the social environment in its work practice. In contrast, Carlotto³¹ and Slišković and Maslić Seršić³⁶, following Malasch and Jackson's trend, show that gender differences may be related to issues such as type of occupation, role of sex in socialization and family responsibility, where women are more involved with care, feeding, and concern for the well-being of other people, so that the teaching profession is understood as a link between maternal function and can demonstrate a greater emotional exhaustion linked to the female role. Furthermore, this exhaustion may be associated with the fact that the woman, besides teaching, is responsible for caring for the home. Non-professional achievement may be related to expectations of success, competition, and development, factors identified in the male role.

The amount of courses taught by the teacher showed a statistically significant correlation with the EE dimension, which can be explained by the increase in the workload of the professional¹⁵. The daily contact with a significant number of students also showed such significance and is understood to occur due to the increase in the professional-client relationship, which increases the professional demand, since the clients, who are the students' parents, place their expectations on teachers to their children, increasing stress at work, leaving the worker

more vulnerable to burnout syndrome. This relationship may further intensify due to the high prevalence of Burnout Syndrome in students, and worsen when students do not receive social support from schools, teachers, parents, and colleagues. However, school or teacher support has a stronger impact on student attrition than parental or peer support³⁸, thus increasing the daily overhead of the teacher's routine.

5 CONCLUSION

According to the results of this study, among the three dimensions of Burnout, the one that had main relevance was the one of emotional exhaustion, showing correlation with the number of courses that the teacher teaches and the daily contact with more students. This result points that teachers need to reflect on their work practices. In addition, it is extremely important that the professional knows and could identify the manifestations of the syndrome in himself and in the people with whom he relates in the work.

RESUMO

Avaliação da síndrome de Burnout em professores universitários

A profissão docente é considerada pela Organização Internacional do Trabalho como uma das mais estressantes, por ser uma atividade que envolve intenso contato entre pessoas. Com isso, a incidência de elementos que conduzem à síndrome de Burnout está cada vez mais evidente nestes indivíduos. O objetivo desse estudo foi avaliar a síndrome de Burnout entre os professores da graduação dos cursos da área da saúde. Foram convidados a participar da pesquisa docentes dos cursos da área da saúde da Universidade do Oeste Paulista, em Presidente Prudente. Após a assinatura do termo de consentimento livre e esclarecido, foram aplicados dois instrumentos para coleta de dados. Os dados foram tabulados e analisados com o auxílio de programas estatísticos e foi utilizado o

teste de correlação de Pearson ao nível de significância de 5%. Foram entrevistados 72 docentes, sendo que destes, 48 (66,7%) são do sexo masculino e 24 (33,3%) são do sexo feminino. De acordo com as dimensões da síndrome de Burnout, a que mais se destacou foi a exaustão emocional. As variáveis que demonstraram significância na correlação de Pearson foram: a quantidade de cursos que o docente leciona ($p=0,0012$) e a quantidade de alunos com quem tem contato diariamente ($p=0,0463$) dentro da dimensão de exaustão emocional; e a idade ($p=0,0319$) e tempo de trabalho ($p=0,0082$) dentro da dimensão da eficácia profissional. Os resultados identificaram um baixo índice em todas as dimensões, porém houve associação significativa entre as dimensões de exaustão emocional e eficácia profissional com as variáveis sociodemográficas. **Descritores:** Docentes. Educação Superior. Estresse Psicológico. Esgotamento Profissional

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