

“Psychology of health and mental hygiene: Psychosocial risks, consequences, and possibilities of work stress prevention”

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PSYCHOLOGY OF HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE: PSYCHOSOCIAL RISKS, CONSEQUENCES, AND POSSIBILITIES OF WORK STRESS PREVENTION

Abstract

The relevance of the study lies in the warning of burnout syndrome, which is currently the most frequently solved problem among workers. The study aimed to determine which of the most affected groups of workers is most endangered by psychosocial risk factors. The study aims to point out the issue of burnout syndrome and determine preventive steps to prevent burnout syndrome. The best-chosen method was a survey, which allowed getting as many results as possible. The questionnaire survey interviewed 80 respondents in 2018. The total number of relevant questionnaires used was 50. 11 questionnaires were from employees in the sales department, and 39 questionnaires from employees in the warehouse. Data from questionnaires were processed in Microsoft Excel 2017. Data from questionnaires were selected according to closed and open questions. Open-ended questions were evaluated by keywords. The results, as secondary data, also took into account the primary data. The results of the questionnaires provided a percentage overview of psychosocial stress factors among sales staff and warehouse workers. The results of the questionnaires also served as an incentive to provide measures against burnout syndrome.

Keywords

burnout syndrome, work stress, stressors, stress reactions, stress prevention, working environment, motivators, mental stress, risk factors, work positions

JEL Classification

I14, J17, J28, I31

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary dynamic society requires integration. Workers in labor law must meet employers' requirements and subsequently adapt to working conditions in a particular company. Due to this fact, many workers experience excessive work stress, which can subsequently cause long-term and uncontrollable depression. Depression, which is caused by frustration, mental, and physical exhaustion, can even cause burnout. Burnout syndrome is a disorder of the soul that suppresses the will, in which the motivation gradually decreases (Sofology et al., 2019). Common stressors in the workplace are low wages, excessive workload and few opportunities for growth or advancement, work that is not attractive or demanding, lack of social support (Korimová, 2018), insufficient control over work-related decisions, conflicting requirements, or unclear performance expectations. At such a moment, one can feel helpless and have a very cynical approach to one's work. According to the author of the article, this fact can cause conflicts in the workplace and personal life. Burnout syndrome can be described as a new phenomenon spreading due to changes in the workplace (Ciampa et al., 2018). Burnout syndrome is the overall state of mental

exhaustion of a worker in the workplace due to chronic stress. The physical and signs of burnout syndrome are usually fatigue and exhaustion, decreased immunity, common illness, frequent headaches or muscle aches, changes in appetite, or sleep habits. Emotional symptoms and symptoms of burnout syndrome are feelings of failure and self-doubt, feelings of helplessness, traps and defeats, separation, feelings of loneliness in the world, loss of motivation, still cynical and negative outlook, reduced satisfaction, clarification (Desrumaux et al., 2015) and a sense of accomplishment.

Workers who feel burnout distance themselves from social contacts and mandated responsibilities. Therefore, burnout syndrome can be described as a type of stress and emotional fatigue (Brotheridge & Grandley, 2002), several negative emotional symptoms, such as extremely high fatigue, irritability, depression, poor concentration of attention, and emphasis on people's symptoms and behavior. More than physical symptoms, burnout is always mentioned in connection with the performance of a particular profession (Gawke et al., 2018). Symptoms of the syndrome often occur in absolutely healthy individuals in today's successful and globalized times (de Wit et al., 2018). Burnout syndrome can be closely related to the negative attitudes of a particular individual (Kwiatosz et al., 2018). All components of the burnout syndrome have a common feature in chronic stress from work, which may be accompanied by further stress from personal life, social and physical environment (Emert et al., 2017; Hansung & Stoner, 2008).

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

The profession is characterized by high demands on performance, without the possibility of longer relief and serious consequences in case of error. The performance of such work is associated with high commitment and great responsibility. The burnout syndrome is inevitably related to assisting professions. The worker can be both a professional and a volunteer. The first place includes doctors and nurses who are constantly experiencing the physical and mental pain of patients and their family members (Codier et al., 2013; Madadkhani & Nikoogoftar, 2015; E. Codier & D. Codier, 2017). Besides, some teachers feel little interest in or lack of interest in curriculum and school, according to authors who deal with the issue of burnout syndrome among teachers (Sadeghi & Knezrlou, 2016). Higher rates of burnout syndrome also occur in special educators who work with pupils with disabilities (Fisher, 2011; Tikkanen et al., 2017; Lichner et al., 2018) or behavioral disorders where the learning process is far more complex, specifies a study of stress analysis by Gabrhelová et al. (2015) and psychologically more demanding when the learning outcomes may not be satisfactory for a social pedagogue (Patti et al., 2015).

Social services workers are also vulnerable as they have continuous contact with people with disabilities (Van Agteren et al., 2018), behavioral disorders, or are socially disadvantaged

(Halawany et al., 2015). Long-term contact with disabled people requires a high level of resilience and the ability to deal with work-related stress continuously (Wilkes et al., 2017). The most demanding is the work with clients involuntarily in a particular facility (i.e., prison, educational institutions, some departments of psychiatric hospitals), or they are not sufficiently motivated to participate in a certain program they are included in it and receive it passively. Most of these social workers face a lack of recognition and respect (Sánchez Moreno et al., 2015; Lowicki & Zajenkowski, 2017). According to Stratil, Rieger, and Voelter-Mahlknecht (2017), burnout has been associated with a negative energy balance, i.e., the absence of a source of joy in life and adequate anchoring in the body. Major manifestations include depression, indifference, cynicism, contact avoidance, loss of self-confidence, frequent physical problems, and illness (van den Berg et al., 2017).

The burnout syndrome is related to the fact that social workers often have inadequate expectations for themselves, i.e., the postmodern society supports the image of a strong "unwavering" assisting professional (Williams et al., 2018). The organizations prefer such types of helping professionals who often have problems with individuals receiving assistance from others, although they help others in their profession (Randall & Bodenmann, 2017). The list of professions that are the most at psycho-

social risk of burnout syndrome includes helping professions, like medical staff, teachers, fire-fighters, etc. According to Manuti and De Palma (2014) who focus on human capital management in their studies, there is frequent communication with people, such as managers, sales managers, journalists, and people who perform stereotypical work as workers in the factory, sewing, etc. The development of burnout syndrome is specifically helped by workplaces that are not attended to by staff, the new members are not trained by experienced staff, and there are no plans for personal development, lack of supervision, a rival atmosphere, and strong bureaucratic control of the behavior of staff or clients (Spanier et al., 2017).

2. AIMS AND HYPOTHESES

The paper aimed to assess the occurrence of burnout in COOP (European Community of Consumer Co-operatives), the consumer cooperative with the branch in Jičín in the Czech Republic, within a sample of workers.

The author preliminarily determined the percentage of hypotheses, which she estimated from the acquired theoretical knowledge and practical skills during professional practice in HR specialist position in a manufacturing company based on a preliminary estimate of a questionnaire survey. To achieve the stated objective, hypotheses were formulated, which were confirmed or refuted based on the findings of the questionnaire survey.

- H1: More than 60% of warehouse workers feel a great responsibility, and at the same time, they do not see their job as well-paid.*
- H2: Less than 60% of sales-managers feel a great responsibility, and at the same time, they do not see their job as well-paid.*
- H3: More than 50% of executive managers feel that they are subject to disproportionate demands higher than those in the sales department.*
- H4: More than 50% of sales managers feel inadequate recognition in the workplace, which is higher than for workers in the warehouse.*

H5: Warehouse workers more often work under pressure than sales managers, and at the same time, they feel the constant supervision of their superiors in more than 40%.

H6: Executive managers more often work under pressure than sales managers, and at the same time, they do not feel the constant supervision in more than 40%.

H7: More than 60% of warehouse workers are not identified with their workplace. This number is higher compared to sales managers.

3. DATA AND METHODS

The stress syndrome and burnout syndrome are most recorded among retail chains, especially in large cities, due to the hectic environment. However, employees in the supermarket in smaller towns cannot be neglected. Employees who work in the company, mainly in the center, are much more stressed and may perceive stress as part of their work. This reason contributed to the author's decision to choose COOP in a smaller town with a population of around 16,000 for the research sample.

A questionnaire survey of the cooperative's employees was selected for the method of quantitative research. The questionnaire survey helped identify certain groups of workers who have national risk factors for occupational burnout. The sample of the research consisted of workers of three-level work activities. As part of the survey, COOP employees were contacted according to the level of work activities performed, i.e., managers, employees of the sales department, and employees in the warehouse. A comparison with selected groups of workers due to the occurrence of threats was demonstrated. The aim was to determine which of the most affected groups of workers most at risk of psychosocial risk factors is. The questionnaire survey was compiled concerning the identification of stress in the workplace. The individual questionnaires were anonymous and designed to consider other risk factors that are the cause of the burnout syndrome in the sample groups of employees.

In April 2018, 80 respondents were contacted for 14 consecutive days. Out of the 80 question-

naires, the author of the contribution received 53 back, of which 3 questionnaires were excluded as the identification data were missing. In the questionnaire survey, 50 questionnaires were used, including 11 working people in the sales department and 39 in the warehouse. No responses were received from the executive managers. The return rate was 66.25%. The questionnaire contained 20 questions, most of which were closed, 2 half-open, and 1 open. At the beginning of the questionnaire, the questions were raised about employee satisfaction with current employment. Questions about the psychosocial risk factors in the working environment of the company being investigated that may lead to burnout, i.e., the level of information needed to perform the activity, satisfaction with workplace relationships, access of superiors or colleagues, the responsibility of the work or the level of satisfaction with the working environment and the health condition affecting the performance of the profession. The questionnaire also included an open question dealing with improving workplace satisfaction. The questionnaire was closed by identifying questions concerning age, education, gender, and job position of the respondents.

Gained data were processed in a computer program Microsoft Excel 2017. The data from the obtained questionnaires enabled us to determine preventive measures that can eliminate the psychosocial risk factors that support the stress response that is caused by burnout syndrome. For the proposals of measures, it was necessary to involve primary data, to carry out theoretical knowledge, to use secondary data, such as the results of questionnaires, to provide stimuli for follow-up measures in the form of prevention.

4. RESULTS

Summarizing the questionnaire survey results is to make suggestions, recommendations, and measures for measures for the company under investigation. Table 1 shows the psychosocial risk factors that contribute to burnout syndrome. The first 6 risk factors are formulated following the hypothesis given, in which some responses are combined (hypotheses 1, 2, and 5). For the respondents with lower and low salaries, the total number is not determined. Instead, the number of respondents

feeling great responsibility for their work is given.

Table 1. Psychosocial risk factors in the company – summary results

Source: Own processing.

Psychosocial risk factors	Position	
	A sales manager (%)	A warehouse worker (%)
High responsibility	72.73	56.41
Low and lower salary	62.50	77.27
Low and lower recognition by colleagues and superiors	54.55	46.16
Work under pressure	63.63	76.92
Work under too much supervision	42.86	56.67
Poor working environment	18.18	38.47
Unsatisfactory relationships in the workplace	9.09	35.90
Injustice at the workplace	36.36	58.98
Rather bad and bad relations with the superior	18.18	7.74
Insufficient availability of information for work	27.27	15.38

Table 1 revealed the following:

- Greater responsibility for the work done is perceived by the higher percentage of employees from the sales department than employees in the warehouse (72.73% > 56.41%).
- Employees in the warehouse have low or lower payment ratings than the sales department employees (77.27% > 62.5%).
- Lower or low recognition of other colleagues and supervisors is more likely to be found by sales department staff than workers in the warehouse (54.55% > 46.16%).
- Warehouse staff is more exposed to work under pressure than staff in the sales department (76.92% > 63.63%).
- Workers who often work under pressure and at the same time, they feel a high degree of more frequent supervision is more often for workers in the warehouse than the employees in the sales department (56.67% > 42.86%).
- Employees in the warehouse feel the working environment as less satisfying than the employees in the sales department (38.47% > 18.18%).

- Inadequate relations at the workplace are particularly unfavorable for warehouse workers than for employees in the sales department (58.98% > 36.36%).
- Inappropriate or unfavorable relations with the direct superior by percentage are higher for workers in the warehouse (18.18% > 7.74%).
- The availability of the necessary information is often seen as poor by the sales department employees compared to the workers in the warehouse (27.27% > 15.38%).

5. DISCUSSION

To achieve the objective of the article, it is also appropriate to take into account the influence of satisfaction in the company, the occurrence of health problems due to work or work environment changes. The survey revealed that 90.91% of the sales department respondents and 82.05% of warehouse workers are rather satisfied. Only one sales manager reported to be unsatisfied (that is, 9.09%), and seven warehouse workers (17.95%) were rather unsatisfied. It means that the workers are more dissatisfied in the warehouse than those in the sales department (17.95% > 9.09%). 34 respondents answered the question on health problems; six of whom were sales managers (17.65% of the total) and 28 are warehouse workers (82.35%). There is a comparison of 82.35% of warehouse staff > 17.65% of employees in the sales department.

Twenty-five (25) employees would prefer more company changes; six of them were sales managers (24%) and 19 worked in the warehouse (76%). The comparison revealed workers in the warehouse (76%) and staff in the sales department (24%). Based on the results, it is possible to conclude that the warehouse workers reported more risk factors (six out of ten). Workers in the sales department face risk four out of ten factors as reported. In addition to other factors, such as changes in the company or at the workplace, health problems, or employee satisfaction, the workers in the warehouse reported a higher percentage; i.e., workers in the warehouse more frequently deal with psychosocial risk factors that

can cause stress and stress reactions as the cause of burnout syndrome.

The highest percentage was achieved in the low payment valuation of workers, who also feel high responsibility for the work often done under pressure with feelings of injustice at the workplace. Due to the unfavorable payment conditions in the employee remuneration category, high percentages were also achieved within the expected changes in the workplace. In summary, based on the questionnaire survey results, the acceptability limits of the psychosocial risk factors at the workplace were not exceeded to such an extent as would directly threaten workers with burnout. The analytical method of assessing the work and the point method, or the point method, was applied to the warehouse workers who were most dissatisfied with the performance evaluation of the work performed and the subsequent remuneration for work.

Application of the scoring method:

- determination of key tasks of the warehouse staff, sales department, and executives;
- job analysis – a warehouse worker.

A warehouse worker does work activities of storage and handling of goods in the warehouse, as reported. The key tasks include accepting goods and checking the documents, loading and storage of goods, shipping, and preparation for distribution to different branches. The warehouse keeper identifies and updates inventory data, including relevant inventory records. Manipulation uses mechanical means, such as a forklift, as a means of transport.

Designing a quantitative scoring scale for job evaluation.

To design a scoring scale, it is necessary to establish paid labor factors, weights, sub-factors, and degree of specification of the factors: knowledge and skills requirements (sub-factors: qualifications and experience), responsibility (sub-factors: work with other people, manipulation of goods, handling money, communication with the public), labor intensity (sub-factors: physical and mental)

Table 2. Specifications of types of factors

Source: Own processing.

Sub-factor	I	II	III
Qualifications	No or low qualifications for the job	Required qualifications – education, courses	High qualifications required
Experience	Low or no experience	Some knowledge and low experience	Experience required; work cannot be done without them
Responsibility for other people's work	Responsibility only for themselves	Control of fewer people, less responsibility	Control of more people, greater responsibility
Responsibility for handling with goods	Responsibility for storage only	Responsibility for the movement of goods	Responsibility for coordinating the state of the goods
Responsibility for handling with cash	Low or no responsibility	Responsibility to a reasonable extent	Daily responsibility for large amount of money
Responsibility for communicating with the public	Low or no responsibility	Responsibility and daily communication with the public	A person engaging in public relations
Physical demand for work	Low physical demands	Average physical demands	High physical demands
Psychological demand for work	Low psychological demands	Average psychological demands	High psychological demands
Risks at work	Low risk at work	High risk at work	Extremely high risk at work
Working environment	Appropriate working environment	Influenced by risk factors	Influenced by several risk factors

and working conditions (sub-factors: labor risks and working conditions).

Table 2 describes three degrees in which a factor and a sub-factor might be present.

One also sets the weights assigned to the paid factors according to the maximum number of points by their importance (as assumed by the author of the paper).

Assignment of a point rating to the warehouse worker's job.

To determine the scale, it is appropriate to assign to a group of workers in the warehouse the assigned degrees and the relevant points according to the scale.

Assignment of the financial amount for 1 point, final evaluation.

As suggested by the author of the paper, 1.50 CZK should be assigned to one point. The final results are as follows: 690 points x 1.50 CZK = 1035 CZK, i.e. 41 Euro/points. The monetary value achieved for the work done is characterized by the proposed amount of money that workers in the warehouse should receive monthly as a personal valuation to their regular wages to increase their satisfaction, fair pay, and motivation to achieve performance points for their work. The author defines transactional analysis as an important point for identifying aspects that can cause excessive stress and burnout syndrome, where the output is mental well-being and inner satisfaction of the individual.

Table 3. Quantitative scale of job evaluation

Source: Own processing.

Paid factors	Weights (max. points)	Sub-factors	Points for the degrees		
			I	II	III
Requirements for knowledge and skills	200	Qualifications	40	60	90
		Experience	50	70	95
Responsibility	300	For other people	50	80	100
		For handling with goods	50	90	120
		For handling with money	30	60	100
		For communication with the public	40	70	105
Job demand	220	Physical	30	60	100
		Psychological	40	70	95
Working conditions	280	Risk	45	70	95
		Working environment	50	80	100
Total	1,000	X	425	710	1,000

Table 4. Analysis by the scoring method for warehouse workers

Source: Own processing.

Factor	Sub-factor	Degree	Number of points
Requirements for knowledge and skills	Qualifications	II	60
	Experience	I	50
Responsibility	For other people	I	50
	For handling with goods	III	120
	For handling with money	I	30
	For communication with the public	I	40
Job demand	Physical	III	100
	Psychological	II	70
Working conditions	Risk	II	70
	Working environment	III	100
Total			690

Through transactional analysis, it has been found that all the people (human population) have encoded driving mechanisms, also known as motivators that affect each of us since we are young, from which we draw knowledge in our personal and professional lives. Transaction analysis described seven motivators that work without our consciousness and which reflect the basic attitude towards life:

- Be strong – if you follow this principle, you are successful in your life; you have high and responsible jobs and positions in your job. The main idea is the desire for certainty, the disadvantage of overestimating oneself.
- Be open and talk about your wishes – do not be afraid to ask for help, express your feelings.
- Be perfect – precise and competent, but do not be an overly hardworking and responsible man, because then you do not delegate tasks to your subordinates, but do them yourself.
- Focus on yourself – your feelings, thoughts, and needs.
- Be popular – support new social contacts.
- Pull ahead – achieve success in your life, do not waste time and energy unnecessarily where it no longer makes sense.
- Do not hurry – choose your own pace, stay calm – plan everything, move towards peo-

ple, and your tasks with feeling, balanced, in harmony.

Anyone working in an assisting profession of working with people should be aware that they will be permanently exposed to psychological stress that should be prevented or successfully cured. Effective prevention includes deepening mental and physical concepts, creating high-quality interpersonal relationships, supporting open communication, formulating priorities, and achievable objectives. The recommendation is as follows – reduce too high requirements, set priorities, seek support, use help, learn to say no, do not fall into the helper's syndrome, prevent communication problems, at critical times keep balance, take breaks, express your feelings openly, seek emotional support, avoid negative thinking, replenish energy, take care of your health, be for yourself and others in a balanced state. Qualitative results were provided as feedback for employers and the personnel department of COOP in Jičín to improve the environment and reduce stress in the workplace. The COOP employer should perform the scale of emotional exhaustion following the questionnaire survey quarterly. The questions in the questionnaire survey compiled by the author could be the basis for creating the same or similar questions by the COOP employer to avoid fluctuations and gain employees. Every employee who feels mentally well at work will also be satisfied at work, do the job conscientiously, meaningfully, and systematically. The obtained results were presented to the management of COOP at a working meeting. Ideas for change were discussed and sub-

sequently incorporated into the implementation plans for adjusting the work environment and climate in the workplace, changes in organizational conditions allowing open space around the workplace, work methods and influence on work performance, concentration, creativity, and innovation in thinking in favor of a favorable environment using modern technologies, the meaning of teamwork with the application of brainstorming. The concept of the design of the workplace according to the method of work was to change the de-

sign of the use of open space under one roof, creating an innovative, modern approach to spaces full of energy, but also space for calming in order to more favorable perception of sensory perceptions. With a changing workplace, support for natural behavior combined with design modifications and a change in the thinking of employees accepting innovative designs, COOP management supported a new feedback system measurable according to qualitative and quantitative data with 3% higher expected results.

CONCLUSION

A questionnaire survey was chosen as the best method for identifying certain employees. The questionnaire survey enabled us to compare the selected employees of three-level work activities. The questionnaire survey questions were set so that the answers from the questionnaires enabled us to identify the main causes of the burnout syndrome. Burnout syndrome, as found, is caused by long-term stress, such as work stress in the case of a contribution focused on the issue of burnout syndrome among employees of COOP, a consumer cooperative with a branch in Jičín in the Czech Republic.

To evaluate the questionnaire survey, 7 hypotheses were established, of which 3 were confirmed, 2 were refuted, and 2 were not evaluated due to missing data for executive managers. Based on the classification, it was found that the burnout syndrome was not confirmed in any of the contacted groups of workers. It has been investigated which stressors spread to such an extent, and consequently, the burnout syndrome is caused. By comparing the stress factors affecting the workplace and the workers, it was found that the group of workers from the warehouse is more endangered. From the results, the author identified psychosocial risk factors that lead to burnout syndrome. Highly responsible, low pay, low recognition from colleagues or superiors, work under pressure, and work under excessive supervision often lead to burnout syndrome of all COOP employees. Risk factors were reported mainly by warehouse workers.

Overload at work is caused by time pressure and higher responsibility. When tasks assigned to a person or superior are formulated beyond human capabilities, stress occurs. Stress also arises when tasks are unclear when employees do not know what to do, such as constant uncertainty about possible job loss. The pressure on employment increases the pressure on subordinate employees (regular employees) in the way they are underestimated and on managers, for example, by overestimating opportunities, excessive responsibility, and other influences. In the case of long-term effects of stress factors in the workplace, there is a process of increased frustration caused, for example, by workers leaving the workplace, reducing the company's production by under sizing workers (regular employees) by regulating limited workforce below the allowable limit.

The research revealed that at COOP in Jičín, despite the identified risk factors, there is also excessive satisfaction and minimal health problems for all employees. 25 employees out of 50 interviewed employees would also welcome further changes in the company. The author also used transactional analysis to obtain the results, which helped identify aspects that can cause excessive stress and burnout. The transactional analysis identified motivators that affect our psyche, specifically our consciousness and, subsequently, our attitude to all important decisions and situations in our lives.

The author of the article considers using the questionnaire survey to be used in potential supermarkets not only in smaller towns and villages but also in larger ones. The results would then be compared to

better deepen the issue of excessive stress and burnout in smaller and larger towns or villages. The aim would be to prevent and reduce long-term excessive work stress and thus burnout. In the author's opinion, an environment with a minimal amount of stress in a smaller town or village can bring corrective measures that will help prevent the burnout syndrome in time initially, especially in large cities. Nowadays, many employees and employers do not take burnout syndrome seriously. This issue is not discussed in many jobs, and the burnout syndrome is, therefore, considered something that does not exist and therefore cannot break out in the work environment, where a certain degree of stress is recorded. Regular consultations, training, workshops, or helplines for employees and managerial positions, such as managers, should be taken into account in the fight against excessive stress and the subsequent burnout syndrome. Each company directive considers the rights and obligations of employees, so the part preventing the burnout syndrome in the form of ensuring the mental well-being of the employee in the form of regular consultations and meetings with personnel workers should be anchored here.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Conceptualization: Radka Vaníčková.
 Formal analysis: Radka Vaníčková.
 Investigation: Radka Vaníčková.
 Methodology: Radka Vaníčková.
 Project administration: Radka Vaníčková.
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 Supervision: Radka Vaníčková.
 Validation: Radka Vaníčková.
 Visualization: Radka Vaníčková.
 Writing – original draft: Radka Vaníčková.
 Writing – review & editing: Radka Vaníčková.

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