

INFLUENCE OF PEDAGOGICAL ACTIVITY ON PSYCHO-EMOTIONAL HEALTH OF SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS

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Abstract

Recent scientific publications determine professional health and the favourable psycho-emotional state as an essential aspect of the effective teacher's professional activity. Individual education teachers are in an "at-risk group" concerning the occurrence of professional burnout syndrome, which is determined by the increased neuropsychiatric tension of their professional activities. As part of the scientific school "Psychological and pedagogical providing of educational and correctional work with children who have psychophysical development disorders", the authors conducted a study of the level of professional burnout of special education teachers who are working with children with psychophysical disorders. For the experimental research were used such methods as observation, questionnaires and a questionnaire of professional (emotional) burnout - Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI). In the vast majority, special education teachers have an average and high level of professional burnout, which affects their well-being, health, relationships with others and assessment of their professional competence. The factors that will contribute to the preservation of psycho-emotional health of teachers and overcoming of professional burnout are rest, a favourable socio-psychological climate in the team, decent wages, social protection from the state and psychological support.

Keywords: Health, Psycho-Emotional Health of Teachers, Professional Burnout, Pedagogical Activity, Special Education Teachers.

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INTRODUCTION

Preservation of the teacher's psycho-emotional health is an essential problem in current conditions of reforming the educational sector. The specifics of the teacher's work require not only high professional competence, but also constant interpersonal interaction, emotional commitment and a high level of responsibility for the students' life and health. This problem is particularly relevant for teachers working in special education institutions with children with special educational needs. The profession of the special education teacher belongs to a group of professions with increased neuropsychiatric tension, which negatively affects not only the emotional state of specialists but also their health in general.

By definition of the World Health Organization (WHO), health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being. Health is a necessary condition for healthy, active life and working capacity of a person, his success in professional activities. According to numerous studies, the state of health of special education teachers is a cause for concern. Statistics show that 60% of teachers regularly experience psychological discomfort during work; 85% - are in a constant state of stress; 33% of female teachers have diseases of the nervous system, their professional activities negatively affect family relationships [1]. Chronic neuropsychiatric and informational overload, constant exposure to various stressful factors, the lack of conditions for relieving psycho-emotional fatigue at schools, insufficient competence in matters of preserving and strengthening their health often lead to the development of "professional (emotional) burnout syndrome" [2].

Despite the urgency of this problem, there have been no targeted studies of the impact of professional activity on the psycho-emotional health and level of professional burnout among special

education teachers in Ukraine. All this led to the choice of the research subject.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

The staff of the department of Correctional Pedagogy and Inclusive Education conducted an experimental study of the impact of professional activity on the psycho-emotional health of special education teachers. To achieve this goal, we used the following methods: theoretical analysis of scientific sources on the research topic; observation; questionnaire of special education teachers; questionnaire of professional (emotional) burnout (Maslach Burnout Inventory - MBI) K. Maslach та S. Jackson; quantitative and qualitative analysis of the obtained results.

The questionnaire we developed focused attention at teachers' self-assessment of their psycho-emotional health. In particular, it collected the following information: general information about the subjects of research (age, work experience); special education teachers assessment of such issues:

1. Do you feel any changes in your personality under the influence of your professional activities? Which ones?
2. Do you feel tired or exhausted from work?
3. How do you assess the socio-psychological climate of the staff at your educational institution?
4. Did your relationships with colleagues affect the quality and productivity of your work?
5. How can you describe your relationship with students?
6. Do you have a feeling of emotional exhaustion as a result of working with children with special educational needs?
7. How do you calm down from anxiety?
8. Did the problems at work affect your physical well-being?

9. Have you ever had a feeling of professional incompetence, lack of confidence in your abilities?
10. What are the professional harms in the activities of special education teachers that negatively affect their health and emotional state?
11. What methods, techniques, or measures will help to preserve your physical and mental health?

Questions had the aim to identify the manifestations of emotional burnout associated with the professional activities of special education teachers. In particular:

- Availability of distinct physiological and somatic reactions to situations related to the pedagogical activity;
- Lack of confidence about your professional competence;
- Availability of professional deformation of a personality;
- Lack of collective unity and support from colleagues.

A professional (emotional) burnout questionnaire MBI was used to assess the level of professional burnout. It was created in 1986 by K. Maslach and S. Jackson and adapted by N. Vodopianova [4]. The method has the aim to diagnose the level of professional burnout according to three scales [4]:

1. "Emotional exhaustion": a reduced emotional tone, increased mental exhaustion and affective lability, loss of interest and positive feelings for others, feelings of "satiety" with work, dissatisfaction with life in general.
2. "Depersonalization". In the context of burnout syndrome, "depersonalization" involves the formation of unique, destructive relationships with other people. It manifests itself in emotional detachment and indifference, the regular performance of professional duties without personal involvement and empathy, and in some cases in negativity and cynicism.
3. "Reduced personal accomplishment" reflects the degree of satisfaction of the teacher with himself as a person and as a professional. High scores on this scale reflect a tendency to assess one's competence and productivity negatively and, as a result, a decrease in professional motivation, an increase in negativity about professional responsibilities, a tendency to withdraw from responsibility, isolation from others, and avoidance from work at first psychologically and then physically.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Essence of the Concept "Professional Burnout"

Theoretical analysis of scientific sources shows that scientists consider professional burnout as a syndrome formed against the background of chronic stress and one that leads to the depletion of emotional, physical and personal resources of a person and its dissatisfaction with the results of his professional activities [3]. K. Maslach defines professional burnout as a mental state that is characterized by the appearance of feelings of emotional emptiness and fatigue caused by a person's professional activity. It combines emotional emptiness, depersonalization and reduction of personal accomplishment. Professional burnout is a prerequisite for professional deformation of the person [4].

For the first time, the phenomenon of professional burnout was described in the early 70-ies of the twentieth century by the American psychiatrist H. G. Freudenberg, who consider it as a state of healthy people who actively and emotionally communicate with clients in the course of their professional activities. Today professional burnout is a problem that is recognized by the world health organization (WHO) as a separate disease in terms of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD 10) [5].

Symptoms of professional burnout are divided into three groups [3; 4; 6]:

- Psychophysical – feeling of chronic fatigue, emotional and physical exhaustion, general asthenization of the body, frequent unprovoked headaches, gastrointestinal disorders, sleep disorders, shortness of breath or respiratory disorders during physical or emotional stress; a noticeable decrease in external and internal sensory sensitivity: deterioration of vision, hearing, smell and touch, loss of internal, bodily sensations;
- Socio-psychological – indifference, passivity, depression, increased irritability, frequent nervous breakdowns, the prevalence of irrational negative emotions, increased level of anxiety, negative attitude to life and professional prospects.
- Behavioural – reduced motivation to work, indifference to its results, conflict behaviour, distancing from colleagues and students, overly critical assessment of others, alcohol and nicotine abuse.

Results of Behavior Monitoring of Special Education Teachers in their Professional Activities

Monitoring of individual education teachers was carried out both in the course of professional activity and at training courses for teachers to identify types of personal response to everyday and stressful situations, methods of conflict resolution, means of interaction with students and other participants of the educational process. The results of monitoring show that quite a large number of teachers reveal increased anxiety in their activities; they react acutely to their difficulties, show impulsiveness in communicating with children and colleagues. During the conversations with teachers of higher educational institutions, special education teachers complained of exhaustion, fatigue, and high tension of the nervous system caused by working with children with psychophysical disorders.

Results of Special Education Teachers Self-assessment of their Own Psychoemotional Health

In the survey, 83 teachers of special educational institutions from Kyiv, Odesa, Chernivtsi regions took part. All of them work with children with psychophysical development disorders (children with intellectual disabilities, musculoskeletal disorders, speech disorders). The results showed the following.

Among the respondents were people of different ages, with different professional experience. Namely: 14% of people under the age of 30; 23% - 31-40 years; 23% - 41-50 years; 29% - 51-60 years; 11% - over 60 years.

Experience of Work in Special Institutions

- up to 5 years – 13%;
- 5-10 years – 20%;
- 10-20 years – 29%;
- 21-30 years – 20%;
- Over 30 years – 18%.

The vast majority of respondents (90%) said that they felt changes in their personality under the influence of professional activity. The rest of the respondents (10%) did not feel such changes, which is explained by a little experience (up to 5 years) of working in a special institution. In the next question, respondents enumerated changes that occurred to them. Teachers noted such positive changes as professional growth, professional development-12%; media literacy-10%; more considerable restraint, loyalty, tolerance-10%; getting new experience-8%; self-confidence-8%; development of creative abilities-7%; growth of pedagogical skills, mastering new pedagogical technologies – 7%; a desire to improve, self-education, self-development-5%; ability to communicate with students' parents-1%. As negative changes were enumerated:

exhaustion-5%; emotional fatigue/physical fatigue, irritability / nervousness-6%; deterioration of health - 2%; lack of emotion, sensitivity to injustice, change of character, pretended joy -1%. 18% of respondents did not name changes that occurred with them under the influence of professional activity. It may be due to the lack of working experience in a special institution, as well as lack of awareness of these changes or unwillingness to express it.

On the question "Do you feel tired or exhausted from work?" 53% of the respondents gave an affirmative answer, and 47% gave a negative one. There was no direct correlation between age and fatigue in the responses. In particular, teachers aged 72 and 76 said they did not feel tired.

86% of the respondent teachers rated the socio-psychological climate in the team where they work, as favourable, 13% - as insufficiently favourable, 1% of respondents could not assess it. More than half (53%) of teachers noted that relationships with colleagues affect the quality and productivity of their work; 43% does not note such an impact; 4% no answer.

The obtained results have a positive character. Relationships with colleagues under the condition of a favourable socio-psychological climate in the team are also overwhelmingly positive. These indicators show a generally positive atmosphere in the relationships of employees of special education institutions, feeling of support and assistance from colleagues,

what are the ways to prevent and overcome the burnout syndrome.

To the question "How can you describe your relationship with students?" the following responses were received:

- democratic, partnership relations - 80%;
- an authoritarian approach is the most acceptable in dealing with students - 7%;
- I have not a clearly defined strategy of behaviour with students - 7%;
- My relationships with students depend on my mood and well-being - 4%;
- 2% gave their answer - "individual style"; "depending on the situation (democratic + authoritarian)».

These responses do not show any dependence between the age or experience of respondents.

At the same time, the overwhelming majority of respondents experience emotional exhaustion as a result of working with children with special educational needs ("often" - 11%, "sometimes" - 73%), which indicates an increased emotional tension in their professional activities.

Also, teachers noted other occupational hazards that affect their health and emotional state. They are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Professional harms that negatively affect special education teacher health and emotional state

Factor №	Responses	Quantity
1.	Emotional stress / emotional pressure	25
2.	Nervous and emotional stress/overpressure/burnout	19
3.	Working with disadvantaged families / aggressive behaviour of parents/misunderstandings with parents / excessive demands	13
4.	A large amount of paperwork	11
5.	The complexity of the programs for teaching children with SEN/inconsistency between educational programs and capabilities of students with SEN	5
6.	Neglecting of the teaching profession	5
7.	Misunderstandings with children	3
8.	Insufficient level of feedback from students	3
9.	Psycho-emotional state of students and their inappropriate behaviour	3
10.	Responsibility for children	3
11.	Propensity to disease	2
12.	Overtime work at home	2
13.	Lack of modern textbooks	2
14.	Internet addiction	2
15.	Infectious and parasitic diseases	1
16.	Lack of sufficient educational and methodological support	1
17.	Age	1
18.	Uncertainty	1
19.	Constant changes in the educational process	1
20.	Lack of topics for communication	1
21.	Not always positive results of educational and correctional work	1
22.	No answer	6

* Respondents named several factors, so the total number of responses exceeds 100%

The table shows that almost a third of respondents (30%) consider emotional stress or emotional pressure as the main occupational hazards; 23% referred to overload at work, burnout, and nervous and emotional stress. The 16% of respondents believe that their psychological and emotional health is affected by working with dysfunctional families, misunderstandings with parents and excessive demands to

teachers. Quite often (13%) respondents named a large amount of paperwork at school as the reason for their irritation and exhaustion. Some teachers believe that their work is complicated by the children themselves, for example by misunderstandings with students (4%), insufficient level of feedback from pupils (4%), psycho-emotional states of children and their behaviour (4%).

The vast majority of respondents noted that problems at work affect their emotional state ("yes, always" – 32%, "sometimes" – 49%); 19% of respondents deny the presence of such an influence. Besides, 63% of teachers note that they regularly (5%) or occasionally (58%) have a feeling of their professional incompetence, lack of confidence in their abilities. The indicators above are the leading symptoms of professional burnout. Sometimes, these indicators are not recognized and considered as unimportant.

Respondents named such options for self-calming after anxiety and stressful situations (see Table 2):

Table 2: Options for calming down after anxiety, stressful situations

Factor №	Responses	Quantity
1.	Switching to physical work, other activities (lace-making, sewing, cooking), favourite things (drawing, folding puzzles, solving crosswords)	20
2.	Listening to music	13
3.	Pleasant conversations	13
4.	Camping/walking	12
5.	Breathing exercise	10
6.	Sleep	10
7.	Reading fiction	9
8.	Auto-suggestion / complacency / meditation	8
9.	Watching a good movie	6
10.	The desire to be alone	5
11.	Taking medication	3
12.	Sports / dance	3
13.	Counting	2
14.	Rethinking the situation	2
15.	Trying not to worry	2
16.	Positive thought	2
17.	Delicious food	1
18.	Family	1
19.	No answer	9

* Respondents named several factors, so the total number of responses exceeds 100%

As we can see, the majority of respondents believe that switching to other activities for example physical work, lace making, sewing, cooking, drawing, doing puzzles, solving crosswords, listening to music helps to calm down. As a relaxation option 16% of teachers chose communication, 14% - outdoor recreation, 12% - sleep, 12% - breathing exercises, 11% - reading fiction, 10% - self-calming. Respondents also mentioned ways to calm down, such as watching a good movie (7%), being alone (6%), sports (2%), taking medication (2%). 11% of teachers did not answer (those respondents who said that they are often exhausted also did not answer that question). It indicates their inability to calm down and a high risk of negative changes in health.

Summarizing the results of the survey, we can say that the professional activity of a special education teacher is characterized by increased emotional tension, which hurts the nervous system and the general condition of the body. Positive factors of such work are the favourable socio-psychological climate in the teaching teams and good relationships with students, which partially helps teachers to overcome the symptoms of professional burnout and sometimes prevents its occurrence.

The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) results experimentally confirmed the information we obtained from the survey. High ratings at the "emotional exhaustion" and "depersonalization" scales and low at the "reduced personal accomplishment" scale indicate a high level of professional burnout Table 3 sums up the information.

Table 3: The scales of professional (emotional) burnout of special education teachers according to the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI)

Name of the scales	Low level	Average level	High level	Very high level
Emotional exhaustion	21%	58%	16%	5%
Depersonalization	20%	62%	14%	4%
Reduced personal accomplishment	21%	64%	13%	2%

Qualitative analysis of the responses showed a slight dependence of the results between the age and work experience. In particular, one-third of the respondents who received low scores on the scale of "reduced personal accomplishment" have 1-2 years of experience in a special institution. Such indicators are natural for the stage of professional adaptation. 57% of respondents with high scores on the scale of "emotional exhaustion" belong to the category of teachers older than 45 years, which also corresponds to the age characteristics. There was no correlation between the state of psycho-emotional health and the type of psychophysical disorder. At the survey stage, respondents should identify methods and techniques that help to preserve their physical and mental health. Table 4 represents the response.

Table 4: Methods, techniques and activities that will help to preserve the physical and mental health of special education teachers

Factor №	Responses	Quantity
1.	Rest / vacation	23
2.	A decent level of wages	15
3.	Switching your mind to something positive	8
4.	Social security / social protection	8
5.	Reducing the amount of paperwork	8
6.	Psychological assistance to overcome professional burnout and emotional discharge	7
7.	Healthy lifestyle	7
8.	Sports, physical activity	6
9.	Training	6
10.	Hobby	5
11.	The alternation between work and rest	5
12.	Travelling / visiting theatre	5
13.	Reading fiction	4
14.	Job security for the next years/confidence in the future	4
15.	Self-training / meditation / techniques of psychological relief	4
16.	Collaboration with colleagues	3
17.	Live communication	2
18.	Additional day for methodological work	1
19.	A collective celebration of an events	1
20.	Permanent working activities (the answer of a 73 years old women)	1
21.	No answer	3

* Respondents named several factors, so the total number of responses exceeds 100%

Analysis of the responses shows that 28% of teachers believe that a vacation or an extended vacation will preserve their physical and mental health; 18% cited an increase in wages as a factor that can help (which is very doubtful). Other respondents as those factors named social protection (10%), switching consciousness to positive aspects of life (10%) or doing

something you love (6%), reducing work with paper documentation (10%), sports and physical activity (7%), travel (6%). A minimal number of respondents (8%) understand that psychological specialists and organization of appropriate training (7%) can help to preserve their emotional health. Thus, the research shows that professional activity has a significant impact on the psycho-emotional health of special education teachers. This effect emerged by personal changes (both positive and negative), and a high risk of professional burnout syndrome. On the positive side, the vast majority of teachers are aware of the negative changes that are taking place and want to overcome them. As an object for further research, we consider the development and implementation of a system of measures for the prevention and overcoming of professional burnout among teachers.

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