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BURNOUT CONTROL OF TEACHERS - A NEED OF THE ROMANIAN SOCIETY

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Abstract

The current issue of burnout syndrome lies in the fact that the main category affected is people, a factor that cannot be neglected or excluded. The term burnout is often used when trying to explain chronic stress in people who work in a field that involves interacting with other people, such as education in our case. The study aims to establish the degree of professional exhaustion of Romanian teachers. Among many factors that led to the decreasing of the Romanian students' results in previous years in international evaluations, one could be very important for the professional exhaustion of the teaching staff, which repercussions directly on the pupils. This phenomenon has negative consequences for both the individual, the institution and society. The purpose of the study is to look at the existence or absence of burnout and how it is influenced positively or negatively by certain variables, such as gender, didactic degree, type of institution, the environment, and the level at which it is practiced. The methodology used in this investigation is the interview guide and the questionnaire applied to a group of 93 teachers from 9 schools from both urban and rural areas. The results of this study provide information about teachers' opinion about teaching profession, the level of professional exhaustion of pre-university teachers and the variables that determine the development of this syndrome.

Keywords: Professional exhaustion, teachers, educational environment, didactic degree, gender.

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1. Introduction

Numerous researches indicate that a large number of teachers have experienced work-related stress or exhaustion. "Teachers have one of the highest exhaustion rates among all professions" (Heller, 2004, p. 4). The European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA, 2013) shows that the level of stress related to the professions is well above the average for other sectors: industry, other services and society in general. The 2007 and 2012 CSSE reports (European Trade Union Committee on Education) include the results of international stress investigations. Researchers have found that workplace stress is present in most professions, but physical and moral exhaustion takes on specific forms and has distinct characteristics for teachers.

Data obtained by foreign researchers show that in Eastern and Western Europe practically two-thirds of teachers are affected by professional stress and a third have obvious symptoms of emotional exhaustion (Vandenberghe, 2006; Jarvis, 2002). Comparative studies have shown a very high level of stress among teachers, relative to the population as a whole, and a low level of satisfaction (Travers & Cooper, 1993).

In 1989, Friesen, Prokop and Sarros conducted a survey based on the questioning of 1211 teachers in order to observe the types of possible burnout. Emotional exhaustion, due to excess work, depersonalization, reduces the feeling of personal fulfillment through work, satisfaction and recognition. Recent research (Roeser et al., 2013) shows that teachers experience different forms of burnout and exemplify each source of exhaustion indicated by the teachers participating in the study. Not only the manifestations but also the sources of burnout are different, some directly derived from the stress of the workplace.

As the most important factor determining the quality of education is the teacher, we allow them to believe that their stress and fatigue can be directly reflected upon students and their learning outcomes.

Maslach considered burnout to be a response to work-related stress, which led to the detachment of teachers to students, their inhuman treatment and inefficiency at work (Maslach, 1975).

Walsh found in his study (Walsh, 1979) that professors who were depleted professionally indicated a non-humanized perception of students, which was accompanied by deterioration in their teaching quality, depression, repeated recourse to medical leave and the tendency to leave the profession.

Joan, Schaufeli and Dirk conducted a study of 249 primary and secondary level teachers in Netherlands consisting of professional exhaustion. As a result, researchers found that pupils' low results are closely related to the higher level of teacher professional exhaustion (Joan, Schaufeli, & Dirk, 1999).

I believe that professional exhaustion could be avoided if teachers were aware of its factors and symptoms, but not alone, because this is not an individual problem but a job problem (Maslach, 2003) and many general, personal, organizational and system factors lead to its occurence.

In Romania, there is no data about the number of teachers who suffer from chronic stress and no programs are currently being carried out to manage this phenomenon, but studies have been carried out to highlight stressors specific to teachers. Expanding research results from other countries could be risky given the major differences between our education and foreign systems.

The European Trade Union Committee (ESEE) has developed a project entitled "Improving the expertise on professional teacher stress and the assistance of ESEE member organizations". The project

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was accomplished between November 2006 and December 2007. The study was attended by 27 European countries, including Romania. The processing of the obtained data allowed to highlight some similarities and differences in the classification of stressors and stress indicators in different countries. In Romania, relatively high rates have been obtained for a large number of stressors and indicators of stress, which indicates that the professional stress of the teachers is a big problem in our country.

Important contributions brought Preda, R. V. in his PhD thesis "Effects of Stress and Coping Strategies on Teachers and Students" (Preda, 2010). He applied on 236 teachers in Romania, 155 female teachers and 81 male teachers and obtained 33% of female teachers and 18% of male teachers with a high level of professional exhaustion. Adriana Mihai, associate professor at the University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Târgu Mureş, has conducted a study (Mihai, Vaida, & Nireștean, 2010) that consists of 40 teachers from the pre-university education: 20 middle school teachers and 20 primary school teachers and found that 32.5% of the teachers are in phase 0, ie no burnout, but 30% are burnout phase 8, which shows the maximum level of burnout. Also 15% are in Phase 2 and Phase 3, respectively, and 7.5% are in Phase 4. The results show that middle school teachers have a higher burnout primary school than teachers.

Thus, follow-up investigations of this syndrome are required as a predictor of student outcomes.

2. Problem Statement

A small number of studies related to the burnout denote that this topic is of great relevance. If there is no concrete research result on this phenomenon then it would be difficult to develop some effective policies that address to the problem. This paper is based on the idea that both teachers and state institutions responsible for education will be more able to avoid the phenomenon of professional exhaustion if they recognize its symptoms, the factors that lead to its occurrence, the prevention measures and overcoming them. For this purpose, this research seeks to identify the level of professional exhaustion among Romanian teachers, from the perspective of several variables that might influence it.

3. Research Questions

Which are the factors that lead to burnout, in the perception of the teachers?

Are there teachers in Romania exhausted professionally?

Are there gender differences regarding the phenomenin of professional exhaustion?

Teachers from state environment have a higher degree of professional exhaustion than those from private environment?

Are there differences between the professional exhaustion of the teachers in the rural environment and the professional exhaustion of the teachers working in the urban environment?

Does the level of education influence the professional exhaustion of the teaching staff?

Does the teaching degree influence the level of professional exhaustion of the teaching staff?

4. Purpose of the Study

This article presents a study that investigated *the existence or non-existence of burnout* for primary and pre-school teachers *and its influence on certain variables* (didactic degree, environment, type of institution, level of teaching and gender).

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5. Research Methods

The methods chosen for the research were: the interview guide and the questionnaire. The interview is an 8-item tool that collects information about the teachers' perception of the workplace. These consist in: motivating the choice of teaching career, the opinion about the profession, reporting to other professions, the advantages and disadvantages of the profession, the amount of work and the complaints about teaching.

The questionnaire used in the research includes 44 items, of which 36 are those from **Job Burnout Inventory**, developed by **Dr. L. Secretan** and adapted for the didactic profession, and 8 we built it after centralizing the results of the interview. The items I made were mixed among the others, and these are: 3, 12, 13, 20, 22, 30, 39, 41. Out of the 8 items, 4 directly measure exhaustion and 4 indirectly measure the target construct. Subjects can express their agreement on these items on a 5-step scale, from 1 to 5, where: 1 = never; 2 = occasional; 3 = often; 4 = usually; 5 = most of the time (Greenglass, Fiksenbau, & Burke, 2003).

The tool is made up of four subscales: **Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalization, Physical Symptoms, Personal Satisfaction**. In this research I used the total score of all items and I did not analyze the subscales.

The applied questionnaire was surveyed on 20 subjects. Pretesting was done to calculate the Cronbach alpha correlation coefficient (0.96) between the distribution of individual scores (of each item) to eliminate inappropriate items, but this was not done because high scores were obtained, reason for which the instrument used in the research was exactly the one used for pretesting.

Choosing the research lot. A research group of 93 teachers from both state and private education institutions from both urban (6) and rural (3) regions was used to conduct this study. There were female and masculine subjects, 27 who were teaching in the rural area and 66 were teaching in the urban environment, 9 did not have a didactic degree, 19 had tenure degree, 28 had second degree and 37 had grade 1.

Administration. The data collection was done by the actual application of the tools, the selected research group. This was done in March - May 2017. The interview guide was applied to 9 teachers in Bucharest and the expected duration of the interview was about 25 minutes. From the processing of interview responses, I extracted important and widely used words and phrases and based on them I formulated 8 items for the final questionnaire.

The employees needed a maximum of 30 minutes to complete the questionnaire. Employees were asked to read carefully the statements and, on a case-by-case basis, to encircle a single variant that best characterizes them or is closest to their opinion. They have been assured that the results are confidential and that there are no good or bad answers. These instructions were also written at the beginning of each questionnaire.

Each topic received a questionnaire on vocational exhaustion and was given the opportunity to ask questions if they exist.

After completing the questionnaire, it was checked whether the subjects checked all the items, and where there was no answer, attention was drawn and it was explained that all items had to be ticked.

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6. Findings

For the interview guide, the method used was the Simple Frequency Response Analysis of the Subjects, and the table below is the highest frequency response. These responses led to the development of 8 items that aim to identify these issues on a larger group of subjects.

Table 01. Frequency Response Analysis of Subjects to the Interview Guide

Answers	Frequency
1. There are difficult moments in my career.	8
2. I have tasks and documents that are not useful.	5
3. My profession is more difficult / demanding than other professions.	5
4. At the end of the program I feel tired / exhausted / overwhelmed.	7
5. Parents do not support me and have a negative attitude towards school.	7
6. I am dissatisfied with the children's lack of interest about school.	4
7. I was tempted to give up the profession.	3
8. I do not agree with the frequent changes in the education system.	4

The statistical analyzes based on the questionnaire were made using SPSS 17, using descriptive statistics - percentage frequency analysis.

First, I analyzed the hypothesis that over 30% of the teaching staff involved in the study, the level of professional exhaustion is high. To verify the hypothesis, I processed the data obtained by applying the median sample to the total score. The scores obtained at the professional exhaustion were recoded as follows: lower scores than the median was a low level of exhaustion and the higher than the median scores represented a high level of exhaustion. According to the chart below, I note that 46.24% of the teaching staff participating in the study show a high level of professional exhaustion, with a much higher percentage for female subjects. This shows that the profession of teacher is largely affected by this phenomenon, as do the specialists (Bährer-Kohler, 2012). The results related to the gender of the subjects are in line with the specialty studies, which also appreciate women's teachers as more vulnerable to occupational exhaustion (Gross, 1994; Rudman & Gustavsson, 2011). Explanations of these results can be women's status in society, greater emotional involvement than men, increased emotivity and affectivity, women's fear of success.

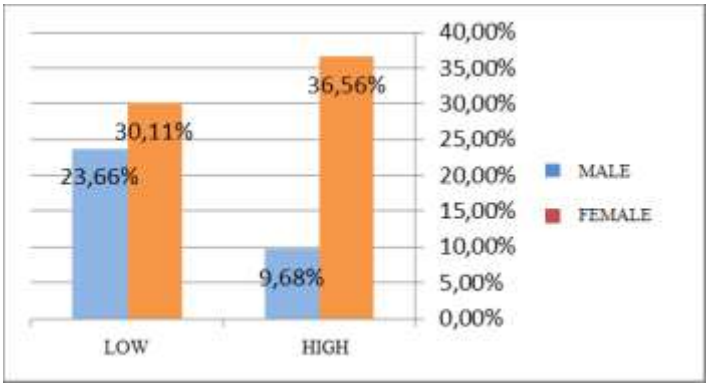

Figure 01. Exhaustion of teachers by gender according to percentages

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The following aspect was the hypothesis that teachers from the state environment have a higher degree of professional exhaustion than those in the private environment. In this case we applied the t test for independent samples and we obtained t (91) = 6,585 and P <0,001, which means that there are significant differences between employees working in state and private institutions in terms of professional exhaustion, meaning that employees working in the state are more exhausted professionally than those in the private sector. Figure 2 presents the graphical illustration of the manifestation of professional exhaustion in the teaching staff subject to the research, depending on the type of institution in which it is practicing, according to the percentage values.

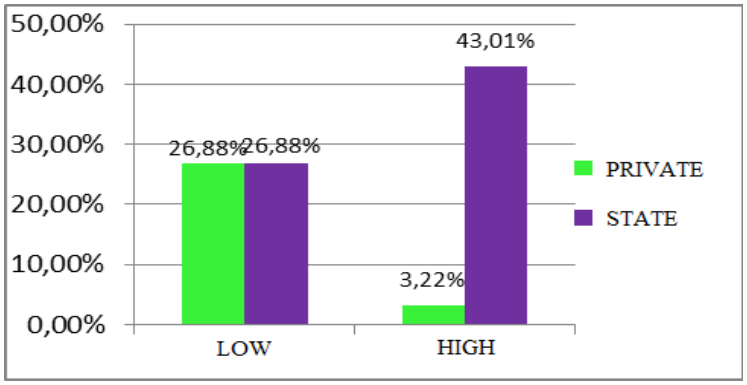

Figure 02. Occupational exhaustion of teachers according to the type of institution in which they work, according to the percentage values

In order to see whether there are statistically significant differences between the professional exhaustion and the environment in which the subjects work, respectively the teaching level, we used the t test for independent samples as a statistical method. For the average variable, we obtained the value of the test t = 0,721 and the significance threshold p = 0,473, which indicates that there are no significant differences between the professional exhaustion of the professors working in the rural environment and the professional exhaustion of the teachers working in the urban environment. For the teaching level variable, I obtained the value of the test t = 0,20 and the significance threshold p = 0,83, which indicates that there are no significant differences between the professional exhaustion of the teachers working at the primary and pre-school level.

Another purpose of the research was to find out whether the didactic degree influences the level of professional exhaustion in the teaching staff. Following this analysis, the Oneway Anova Test identified only one significant difference between two groups, namely, between the theachers who had the tenure degree and the second-grade teachers, as shown in the table below. By analyzing the averages, we note that there is a higher degree of professional exhaustion in second degree teachers compared to teachers who have only completed. Although most researchers argue that younger employees are at greater risk of developing exhaustion, there are researchers who believe that teachers with more years of experience are exposed to much higher levels of stress than their older colleagues (Friedman, 1991; Borg & Falzon. 1989).

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Table 02. Occupational exhaustion according to didactic degree according to the percentage values

Teaching degree	The threshold of significance	Mean
No teaching degree * Grade II	p = 0,548	98,00
Finished * Grade II	p = 0,016	92,63
Second Grade * Grade I	p = 0,457	111,21
Degree I * Completed	p = 0,595	102,13

7. Conclusion

The didactic activity is characterized by frequent emotional tensions, stress, frustration, emotional self-regulation, psychological exhaustion and emotional exhaustion, particularly vulnerable in this respect being women, as we have established in the research. Through the feminisation of educational institutions the issue of emotional exhaustion deserves the attention of researchers to prevent the occurrence of the phenomenon in the deontological behavior of teachers and to ensure the efficiency of the exercise of professional roles.

Research also draws attention to a number of important things, which can be formulated as six conclusions:

- As a result of this investigation, a high degree of impairment of the urothely syndrome was identified in 46% of the subjects participating in the study;

- there are gender differences in terms of professional exhaustion, female teachers presenting a much higher level than male ones;

- the teachers working in the state institutions have a higher degree of professional exhaustion than those who work in private institutions;

- There are no significant differences between the professional exhaustion of teachers in the rural environment and the professional exhaustion of the teaching staff in the urban environment;

- there are no significant differences between the professional exhaustion of the teachers working at the primary and pre-primary level;

- there is a higher degree of professional exhaustion in second degree teachers compared to teachers who have only completed.

We can conclude that teacher exhaustion is conditioned not only by a single cause but by a whole set of factors but whether it is discovered in time and is provided with specialized intervention, individually and collectively, in educational organizations or in contexts informal, these risks can be prevented or diminished.

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