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**CHARACTERISTICS OF EMOTIONAL BURNOUT  
MANIFESTATION IN TEACHERS**

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***Abstract***

Although the issue of professional burnout in teachers and possible measures to prevent and overcome it are being actively studied these days, it is still crucial to conduct more studies in the field as characteristics of emotional burnout differ in each specific case. The study on emotional burnout in teachers was conducted in three stages: desktop analysis, experimental research, and data analysis. The study comprised a range of methods and techniques, in particular theoretical methods in the form of an analysis of literature and compilation of the findings, modelling and definition of objectives, empirical methods in the form of an ascertaining and a forming experiment and testing according to Boiko's Emotional State technique, Howard's Stress Questionnaire and the Maslach Burnout Inventory (developed by Christina Maslach and Susan Jackson and adapted by N.E. Vodopyanova). The study revealed that most schoolteachers have average stress tolerance and average anxiety; half of test subjects experiences an alarm reaction stage and a resistance stage, which indicates a desire for psychological comfort in teachers that makes them want to minimize the pressure of external circumstances. Average emotional burnout displayed through fatigue, sleep disturbance, headaches and memory impairment is experienced by every fourth teacher. A vast majority of test subjects (82%) scored high on the personal accomplishment diminishment scale, which shows strong tendencies towards a negative assessment of personal expertise and efficiency. However, the above-mentioned physiological symptoms in teachers are not severe enough to indicate the need for hospitalization.

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**Keywords:** Alarm reaction, emotional exhaustion, emotional burnout, resistance, stress, teachers.



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## 1. Introduction

Today, person-to-person jobs and teaching in particular are saturated with factors causing professional burnout including a great number of social contacts per working day (Zeer et al., 2019), a significantly high level of responsibility and a requirement to always show the best performance and achieve the best results. Modern society has created an image of a socially successful person who is self-confident, independent, determined and professionally established (Schoeps et al., 2019). Therefore, many teachers try to match this image to meet social expectations and remain in high demand. However, it requires some specific inner resources. For a professional, to be responsible means to experience mental and emotional exhaustion (Abdurakhmanov & Glebskaya, 2018).

The nature of teaching is stressful by default (Boiko, 2013); the teaching is associated with a significantly high level of emotional strain. In this sense, teaching jobs are more demanding on average than jobs of managers, bankers, CEOs or presidents of various associations.

In addition, the teaching profession is becoming today more and more low-paid and financially low-status. The ageing of the workforce in education can be rather clearly observed today as well. Previous studies discovered that teachers with more than 20 years of service exhibit a dramatic decline in all aspects of emotional stability; in other words, after 20 years of working at school, a vast majority of teachers experience pedagogical crises, exhaustion and professional burnout. The increase in length of service, age of teachers and professional responsibilities inevitably result in more severe fatigue and anxiety, worse moods, and more vascular diseases and mental breakdowns. Thus, teachers' mental, physical and social health is exposed to a considerable danger (Abos et al., 2019; Andreeva, 2010; Dolgova & Mamykina, 2018).

Recently conducted studies show the following findings: 62% of teachers constantly experience psychological discomfort when performing their professional duties; 85% of teachers are subjects to long-term stress; 33% of teachers suffer from diseases of the nervous system; 85% of female teachers believe that their professional activity has an adverse effect on their family relationships (Akindinova, 2013).

Summarizing studies related to the issue, it is possible to identify two groups of factors that lead to the development of emotional burnout in teachers of educational establishments. The first group is external factors that might cause burnout; they include:

- work organization factor: exceeded working hours, low pay;
- stressful nature of work;
- work-related problems;
- poor environment within the teaching staff; single-gender staff, conflicts among the staff and with management personnel, stressful environment causing either emotional explosions or emotional withdrawals.

The second group is internal factors including:

- communication factor: the lack of communication skills and skills of handling difficult situations with children, their parents or educational administration;
- inability to control personal emotional states;

- role-based and individual factors: severe diseases and/or the death of close relatives, financial difficulties, personal dissatisfaction, bad relationships between spouses, poor living conditions, the lack of attention paid by family members, dissatisfaction with self-realization in various life and professional situations.

Although the development of burnout is a strictly individual process, Vodopyanova believes it is as contagious as any infectious disease. Teachers suffering from burnout might quickly infect their colleagues with the same condition (Vodopyanova & Starchenkova, 2010).

There are three main stages of professional burnout in teachers (classification by C. Maslach):

Stage 1 (initial). Teachers demonstrate occasional setbacks in behaviour and when performing professional activities, such as forgetting certain moments (for example, whether documents have been updated or not, if students have been asked a certain question, what answer has been given) or exhibiting failures of motor functions. Due to the fear of risk, these setbacks result in increased self-management and self-control of professional responsibilities worsened by mental and emotional strain.

Stage 2. This stage is associated with declined interest in work and communication including interactions at home and with friends:

- feelings of not wanting to be around people, being tired of a never-ending working week and looking forward for Friday; apathy progressing from Monday to Sunday, development of somatic symptoms (fatigue, loss of energy, especially by the end of the week, headaches in the evening);
- dreamless sleeping, a higher number of colds;
- increased irritability (irritated by the smallest things);
- misunderstanding among colleagues, gossiping about some of them outside work;
- resentment towards some colleagues being manifested in their presence and changing from concealed antipathy to uncontrollable bouts of anger.

Stage 3 (the burnout). This stage is associated with a complete loss of interest in work and life in general, emotional indifference, apathy, reluctance to meet people and communicate with them, and constant exhaustion. At this stage, people might still maintain their external presentability out of habit, but it is apparent by their bored look that they have lost all interest in anything.

In view of the above, it can be concluded that professional burnout, characterized by teachers' emotional dryness and emotional withdrawal, personal detachment and disregard for individual characteristics of students, may influence the nature of professional interactions between teachers and students as well.

In regard of professional burnout in teachers, it is crucial to analyse the above-mentioned aspects and study what impact they may have on students. First, emotional exhaustion is discussed. Teachers' emotionality is the key component in ensuring influence and cooperation in the teaching and educational process. It is used to encourage students and engage them in their education by fuelling their intellectual activity. Thus, students of a burnt-out teacher will face difficulties in improving their competence of emotional reaction and responsiveness. As for empathy, which is described as emotional understanding of other people, such students will be reluctant to respond to problems of others and will fail to realize how

they are perceived by others. Students of a burnt-out teacher often demonstrate underdeveloped empathy and self-reflection, which inevitably leads to poor communication skills.

Emotions serve as regulators of students' cognitive activity (Prasojo et al., 2018; Yin et al., 2019). Thus, students with underdeveloped skills of emotional reaction and responsiveness will inevitably show worse results in perception and understanding of educational material. As a result, students begin to be perceived in a negative light by teachers, which hinders their development of adequate self-esteem and leads to dysfunctional behaviour. Negative perception of their results by teachers causes a decrease in motivation to study.

It is common for burnt-out teachers to assess and perceive their students in a negative way.

Another characteristic of a burnt-out teacher is a weak emotional commitment in work (Agnoli et al., 2018; Anghelache, 2015; Barrett & Morgan, 2018). A person-to-person specialist is required to show empathy and compassion to the other party. However, burnt-out teachers do not find these actions necessary and are not interested in them. Such teachers want to reduce or remove altogether those professional duties that demand their full emotional input. As a result, a complete or a partial loss of interest in students occurs. Students begin to be seen as inanimate objects and manipulation tools. Teachers prone to burnout try to transform subject-to-subject interactions with students into subject-to-object interactions (Kiseleva et al., 2016).

Teachers with low self-esteem are unable to perceive themselves or other people in an adequate way; they experience increased anxiety, which also negatively affects their teaching process (Capone et al., 2019; Lauermaann & Konig, 2016). Any unusual situation may result in distorted perception of their students and lead to the development of such personality traits as passivity, lack of initiative, and professional incompetence (Anokhin et al., 2017).

Negative self-concept, low self-esteem, insecurity and constant emotional strain, especially common among young specialists, have been found in the majority of teachers today.

Therefore, ensuring mental health of teachers is an essential condition for protecting the health of children (Gabrelyan, 2014, pp. 238-242).

It is evident that teachers often face the problem of professional burnout. There are various factors that cause this professional hazard, among them are the following (Atmaca et al., 2020; Belousova et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2017):

- a teaching profession is one of so-called public professions; in other words, teachers communicate with a large number of people on a daily basis including children, their parents, and colleagues, which requires special efforts and may result in emotional exhaustion that causes burnout.
- a teaching profession is associated with a great number of physical and emotional loads, controversial thoughts and feelings, doubts and desperation, which depletes emotional resources and causes stress.
- teachers are rarely pleased with results of their activity; they believe that, despite all their efforts, their students do not acquire necessary knowledge efficiently enough. This results in low social adaptation of teachers exhibited through increased anxiety, insecurity, emotional instability, etc.

- teachers have to constantly improve their qualification and stay informed of technology innovations in order to meet qualification requirements, which also causes physical and mental overloads (Gabrelyan, 2014).

It should be noted that burnout is very contagious and can be quickly spread among teaching staff. Therefore, timely assessment and implementation of measures aimed at preventing emotional burnout in teachers must be performed in order to help an infected employee with psychological care (Dolgova et al., 2016; Lavy & Eshet, 2018).

Emotional burnout is a compilation of various psychological problems arising in the course of professional activities.

The professional burnout syndrome is the most dangerous professional illness for those specialists who work with other people, especially for teachers.

Emotional burnout occurs as a result of internal accumulation of negative emotions which could not be released.

Among those who often face the problem of professional burnout are teachers. There are various factors that cause this professional hazard, among them are the following (Klimov et al., 2012; Munk, 2018):

- a teaching profession is one of so-called public professions; in other words, teachers communicate with a large number of people on a daily basis including children, their parents, and colleagues, which requires special efforts and may result in emotional exhaustion that causes burnout;
- a teaching profession is associated with a great number of physical and emotional loads, controversial thoughts and feelings, doubts and desperation, which depletes emotional resources and causes stress;
- teachers are rarely pleased with results of their activity; they believe that, despite all their efforts, their students do not acquire necessary knowledge efficiently enough. This results in low social adaptation of teachers exhibited through increased anxiety, insecurity, emotional instability, etc.;
- teachers have to constantly improve their qualification and stay informed of technology innovations in order to meet qualification requirements, which also causes physical and mental overloads.

## **2. Problem Statement**

Although the issue of professional burnout in teachers is being actively studied these days, this phenomenon continues to grow and spread among colleagues. Therefore, timely assessment and implementation of measures aimed at preventing emotional burnout in teachers must be performed in order to help an infected employee with psychological care.

### **3. Research Questions**

As part of the study, it was deemed necessary to perform an analysis of its steps and determine an adequate set of methods and techniques that could be used to build a sufficient empirical basis to answer the following research questions:

- Is teachers' emotional state critical?
- How much are teachers exposed to stress?
- To what extent is emotional burnout manifested?

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study is to define on the basis of theoretical arguments a degree of emotional burnout in teachers of a specific state school and determine it with an experiment.

### **5. Research Methods**

The study on emotional burnout in teachers was conducted in three stages: desktop analysis, experimental research, and data analysis. The study comprised a range of methods and techniques, in particular theoretical methods in the form of an analysis of literature and compilation of the findings, modelling and definition of objectives, empirical methods in the form of an ascertaining experiment, and testing according to Boiko's (2013) Emotional State technique, Howard's Stress Questionnaire and the Maslach Burnout Inventory (developed by Christina Maslach and Susan Jackson and adapted by Vodopyanova (Vodopyanova & Starchenkova, 2010).

The study was conducted in the Esaulovo Secondary State School. The study involved 32 female teachers between the ages of 27 and 65. The length of service ranged between 5 and 45 years. 4 subjects have secondary professional education, 26 subjects have one higher education and 2 subjects have two higher educations.

In the study, Boiko's Emotional State technique was applied. Test subjects were given forms with questions and instructions.

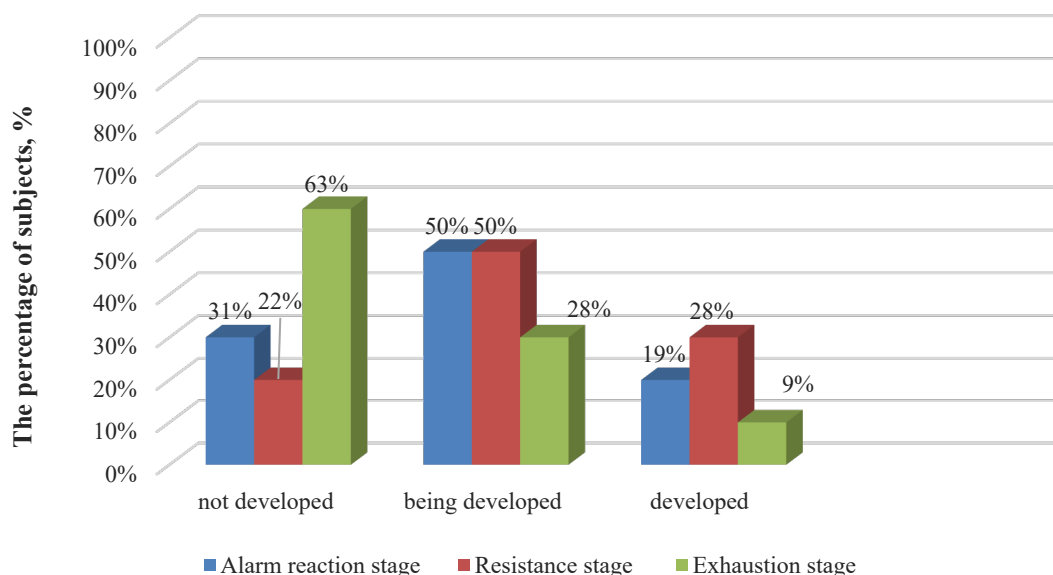
Test results were processed and compiled into tables. The performed qualitative and quantitative analysis showed that teachers indeed have the emotional burnout syndrome.

Boiko's technique can be used to estimate a stage of emotional burnout as well as the extent to which specific symptoms are exhibited in each stage.

- I. Alarm reaction stage – a precursor of emotional burnout and its triggering mechanism.
- II. Resistance stage – distinguishing this stage into an independent one is done rather loosely. In reality, resistance to increasing stress starts with the occurrence of strain. People seek psychological comfort by minimizing the pressure of external circumstances.
- III. Exhaustion stage – associated with a decline in overall energy levels and nervous system. Burnout becomes an integrated part of one's personality.

## 6. Findings

Figure 01 shows results on emotional burnout among teachers of the Esaulovo Secondary State School.



**Figure 01.** Findings on emotional burnout among teachers of the Esaulovo Secondary State School obtained with Boiko`s Emotional State technique

Each stage can be evaluated on the scale from 0 to 120 points. However, it is not reasonable to compare the points of each stage as the points do not indicate the role or importance of each stage in the syndrome. These points are used to estimate various factors which are completely different for each stage; they include responses to external and internal factors, methods of psychological defence, or the state of the nervous system. Quantitative indicators can only demonstrate the extent to which each stage is developed:

- 36 points or less – the stage is not developed;
- 37-60 points – the stage is being developed;
- 61 points or more – the stage is developed.

The alarm reaction stage was found in the development stage in 16 teachers (50%), and 6 teachers (19%) showed an already developed syndrome. This stage can be characterized by:

1. The symptom of worrying about traumatic circumstances.

The symptom is a response to traumatic and stressful aspects of reality that are difficult to address. Desperation and frustration are building up, and insolubility of a situation leads to the establishment of other burnout factors.

2. The symptom of not being satisfied with oneself.

Following failures or inability to change traumatic circumstances, people tend to be dissatisfied with themselves, their profession or their specific professional duties. The phenomenon of emotional

redirection takes place, in which the energy of emotions is projected not only outside of a person but onto the person as well.

### 3. The symptom of being locked in a cage.

Although the symptom is a logical follow-up to stress in the process of development, it does not occur in all instances. When traumatic circumstances put people under a lot of pressure and they are not able to do anything about it, they experience the feeling of helplessness. People respond to that by trying to change the situation through accumulation of all their capabilities in the form of mental resources: mentality, mindset, rationale, plans and objectives. However, if the solution is not found, people undergo a state of intellectual and emotional paralysis.

### 4. The symptom of anxiety and depression.

The symptom of being locked in a cage can evolve into an anxiety and depressive disorder. Specialists experience state anxiety and frustration with themselves, their profession or workplace. This symptom is the last step in the development of the stage.

The resistance stage was found in the development stage in 16 teachers (50%), and 9 teachers (28%) showed an already developed syndrome. This stage can be characterized by:

1. The symptom of inadequate selective emotional reactions. A clear indication of burnout is when a specialist fails to distinguish between two completely different phenomena:

- reserved display of emotions, and
- inadequate selective emotional reaction.

The first case refers to a skill useful in communication with business partners that lies in the ability to display emotions of a restricted range and moderate intensity, such as a friendly smile, a welcoming expression, a soft and calm voice, reserved reactions to strong stimuli, concise forms of disagreement, and the lack of judgement or rudeness. When needed, a specialist can display their feelings in a more emotional way and express genuine compassion towards a partner or a client. This manner of communication demonstrates a high level of professionalism.

A completely different matter is when a specialist “saves” their emotions and limits their emotional reactions through selective responses to situations. These specialists are guided by their whims; if they choose to do it, they pay attention to their students or partners, if they want to, they respond to their needs and requests. Although this style of emotions-related behaviour is not acceptable, it is quite popular. It is due to the fact that people often believe they act in a permissible way, even though their communication partners or outside observers detect something completely different, for example, emotional hardness, insensitivity or indifference.

Inadequate selective emotional reaction is seen as disrespect for an individual; in other words, it concerns issues of morality.

### 2. The symptom of emotional and ethic disorientation.

The symptom is a logical follow-up to inadequate reactions in communication with business partners. A specialist is not only fully aware of not producing correct emotional responses to



communication partners but also makes such excuses as “this kind of people cannot be sympathized with”, “why should I worry about everyone”, “I might be taken advantage of”, etc.

These thoughts and feelings indicate that moral sentiments of a person are being left behind. Doctors, social workers and teachers do not have any moral authority to divide other people into good and bad categories, or into those who deserve to be respected and those who do not. Real professionalism lies in judgement-free treatment of other people, respect for all individuals and personalities and performance of professional duties.

### 3. The symptom of broadening spheres of emotional withdrawal.

Symptoms of emotional burnout are exhibited outside of professional activities, for example, at home or when meeting friends and acquaintances. It is rather common for people to get so tired of contacts and communication at work that they become reluctant to talk even to their family; at work they try to maintain their composure, but at home they either withdraw or vent frustration on their spouse or children. It is often family members who suffer from emotional burnout the most.

### 4. The symptom of reduced professional duties.

The symptom is exhibited through a desire to reduce or remove altogether those professional duties that demand emotional inputs. As a result, students are denied attention.

The exhaustion stage was found in the development stage in 9 teachers (28%), and 3 teachers (9%) showed an already developed syndrome. This stage can be characterized by:

1. The symptom of emotional deficit. A specialist experiences the feeling of not being able to help other people emotionally, in particular not being able to sympathize, comfort or empathize them. The symptom can be traced to emotional burnout due to the fact that this feeling has never occurred before, and a specialist is worried about it. It is associated with irritability, bitterness, harshness and crudeness.

2. The symptom of emotional withdrawal. A specialist is steadily starting to act as a machine. They almost completely exclude expression of emotions from their professional activities while showing them in their other spheres of life as usual.

One of the most striking symptoms of burnout is to react without emotions or feelings. It indicates professional deformation of an individual and may hurt their communication partners, for an example, through the demonstration of personal indifference. A highly dangerous form of emotional withdrawal is the one done on purpose, when a specialist is deliberately trying to show that they do not care about other people.

3. The symptom of personal withdrawal, or depersonalization. The symptom is observed not only at work but also outside of professional activities.

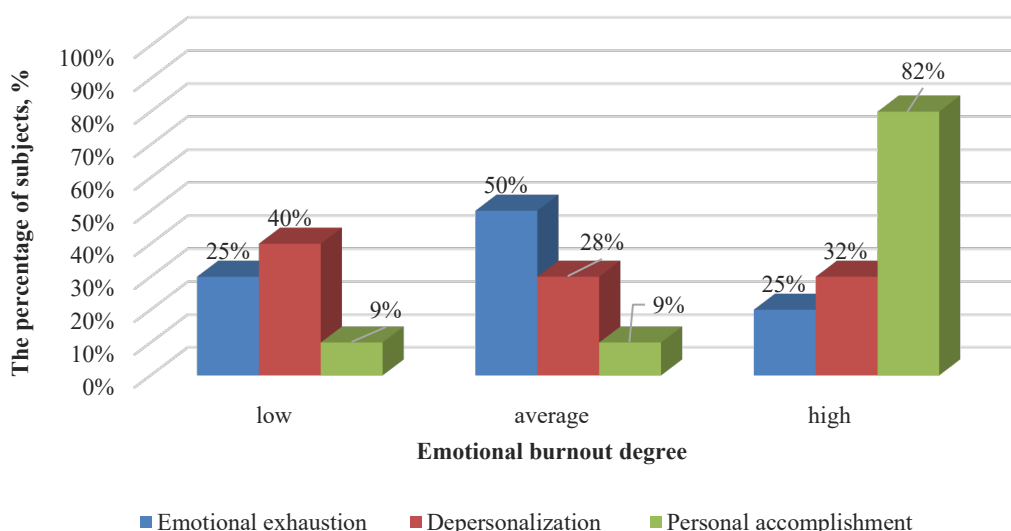
The destructive nature of burnout alters personal values of an individual and leads to an anti-humanistic mindset. A person claims that working with other people is not interesting anymore, it does not bring satisfaction or have any social value. In the worst cases of burnout, a person defends personal views and anti-humanism philosophy: “I hate...”, “I despise...”, or “I would gladly take a gun and...”. In these cases, burnout joins psychopathologic disorders and neurosis-like or psychopathic states. Working with other people is not recommended for these people.

4. The symptom of psychosomatic and psychovegetative disturbances. The symptom occurs in the following case: if a specialist's morality is not corrupted and they cannot allow themselves to treat others with disrespect, but the burnout syndrome continues to develop in them, they might experience psychosomatic and psychovegetative disturbances. Just a thought of their students makes teachers feel frustrated or even scared, puts them in a bad mood and causes discomfort in the heart area, cardiovascular responses and exacerbation of chronic diseases.

The study also implemented the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) in adaptation by N.E. Vodopyanova.

The MBI questionnaire consists of 22 items that can be used to measure three dimensions of burnout: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and personal accomplishment.

Figure 02 shows test results on emotional burnout obtained with the Maslach Burnout Inventory technique developed by Christina Maslach and Susan Jackson and adapted by N.E. Vodopyanova.



**Figure 02.** Findings on emotional burnout obtained with the Maslach Burnout Inventory in adaptation by N.E. Vodopyanova

The analysis of the emotional exhaustion scale showed that 8 teachers (25%) have a low level of emotional burnout. These teachers do not suffer from emotional exhaustion and are eager to perform their duties.

An average level of emotional exhaustion was demonstrated by 16 teachers (50%). These teachers might experience fatigue, sleep disturbance, headaches and memory impairment. However, these physiological symptoms in teachers are not severe enough to indicate the need for hospitalization.

A high level of emotional exhaustion was demonstrated by 8 teachers (25%). For these teachers, emotional exhaustion is exhibited through a decreased emotional energy, an increased mental drainage and affective lability, a loss of interest in and positive sentiments towards other people, the feeling of being overloaded with work, and dissatisfaction with life in general.

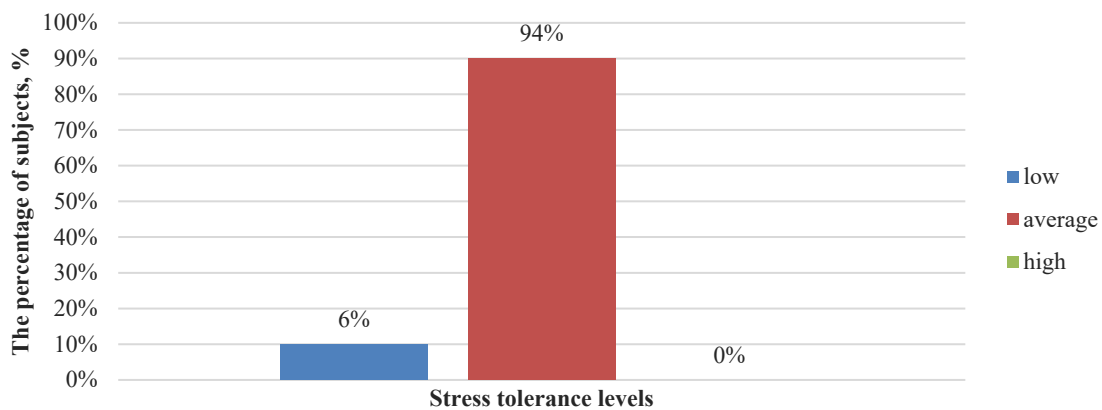
The analysis of the depersonalization dimension of emotional burnout showed that 13 teachers (40%) have a low level of depersonalization; these teachers do not worry about traumatic circumstances and are calm and cheerful.

9 teachers (28%) demonstrated an average level of depersonalization. These teachers occasionally experience deformations in relationships with other people; however, they pass as soon as a traumatic situation is over.

10 teachers (32%) displayed a high level of depersonalization. It is associated with emotional withdrawal, apathy and automatic performance of professional duties without personal commitment or involvement; in some cases, it is accompanied by negativism and cynicism. As for behaviour, depersonalization is exhibited through arrogant behaviour patterns and professional jargon, humour and labels.

The analysis of the personal accomplishment scale showed that 3 teachers (9%) have a low level, 3 teachers (9%) have an average level and 26 (82%) have a high level of personal accomplishment diminishment. This is associated with a negative assessment of personal expertise and efficiency and, as a result, with a decline in professional motivation (Heiskanen & Lonka, 2012; Ivannikov, 2017) an increase in negativism towards professional duties, withdrawal from personal responsibilities (Kleptsova et al., 2018), self-isolation from other people, detachment, non-involvement and mental and physical work avoidance (Malinen & Savolainen, 2016).

Figure 03 shows test results on stress tolerance obtained with Howard's Stress Questionnaire.



**Figure 03.** Findings on stress tolerance obtained with Howard's Stress Questionnaire

A high level of stress tolerance was not found in any study subjects.

30 teachers (94%) showed average stress tolerance. These teachers enjoy relatively positive social interactions, average emotional stability and average anxiety.

2 teachers (6%) demonstrated low stress tolerance, which is characterized by high anxiety, a lack of emotional stability and low self-control.

Thus, most school teachers have average stress tolerance and average anxiety. Half of test subjects have developed an alarm reaction stage and a resistance stage, which indicates a desire for psychological comfort in teachers that makes them want to minimize the pressure of external circumstances. An average

level of emotional exhaustion is demonstrated by 28% of teachers. These teachers might experience fatigue, sleep disturbance, headaches and memory impairment. A vast majority of test subjects (82%) scored high on the personal accomplishment diminishment scale, which shows strong tendencies towards a negative assessment of personal expertise and efficiency (Kedyarova et al., 2019). However, these physiological symptoms in teachers are not severe enough to indicate the need for hospitalization.

## 7. Conclusion

The study showed that a vast majority of teachers of a specific state school have average stress tolerance and average anxiety. Half of test subjects has developed an alarm reaction stage and a resistance stage, which indicates a desire for psychological comfort in teachers that makes them want to minimize the pressure of external circumstances. Average emotional burnout displayed through fatigue, sleep disturbance, headaches and memory impairment is experienced by every fourth teacher. A vast majority of test subjects (82%) scored high on the personal accomplishment diminishment scale, which shows strong tendencies towards a negative assessment of personal expertise and efficiency. However, the above-mentioned physiological symptoms in teachers are not severe enough to indicate the need for hospitalization.

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