

Psycho-correction of burnout syndrome in sports educators

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Abstract:

Burnout syndrome is a state of emotional, mental and physical exhaustion caused by chronic stress at work. This syndrome is primarily inherent in the professions, which involve assisting people and close contact with children. Burnout syndrome is considered as a result of harmful stress in the workplace. Professional activity of sports educators is characterized by high emotional intensity due to many stress factors. These include high dynamism, lack of time, work overload, complicated teaching situations, role uncertainty, social evaluation, constant and intense contact with children, colleagues, interaction with various social groups, etc. All this affects sports educators' emotional state. The article presents the results of an empirical study on the individual's level of burnout syndrome in professional activity. The research aims to determine the level of burnout syndrome in sports educators and verify the effectiveness of the burnout syndrome psycho-correction programme. The research sample comprised 60 sports educators aged between 17 and 24. In order to fulfil the research aim, relevant psychodiagnostic methods were selected to systematically study burnout syndrome in specialists. In the empirical study, Boiko's methodology for identifying the level of burnout syndrome was used. Results. The obtained data prove the decrease in all indicators of specialists' burnout syndrome symptoms. It mostly relates to such symptoms as emotional and moral disorientation (before – 0.75, after – 0.3), feeling “backed into a corner” (before – 0.75, after – 0.3), expanding the field of emotion economy (before – 1.02, after – 0.53), decreasing professional duties (before – 1.00, after – 0.58). Conclusions. Based on the obtained data, a programme of burnout syndrome psycho-correction was designed. It is aimed at assisting sports educators in dealing with the syndrome and increasing the level of emotional stability due to well-developed skills of self-regulation. In the course of the research, it has been proved that the programme is effective. The analysis of the obtained results shows that sports educators are less susceptible to burnout syndrome after the programme has been implemented. This programme can both correct and prevent burnout syndrome.

Keywords: burnout, syndrome, sports educator, specialist, correction programme.

Introduction

By virtue of their profession, sports educators mostly communicate and cooperate with children in need of constant attention, which requires the expenditure of physical and emotional energy.

Intense information overloads and physical stress along with emotional pressure, difficult socioeconomic situations and uncertain prospects of the profession damage mental and somatic health, cause certain diseases, including burnout syndrome. While performing any activity, individuals tend to feel physical and mental stress. Their magnitude can differ depending on the activity. Under constant light or one-time significant loads, the organism unintentionally activates the natural mechanisms of regulating to independently cope with the consequences of these loads. If the loads are significant and continuous, it is important to consciously use different methods and techniques, which help the organism to recover.

It must be noted that conscientious employees, who are devoted to their profession and realize its ideality and significance, are more likely to suffer from burnout syndrome. Once ideological views have been ruined, such employees might realize their own insignificance, become depressed or lose faith in themselves or the profession. Any profession may cause stress and occasionally the individual might lose inspiration or become disappointed with their work. Therefore, many psychological and medical studies are focused on the problem of burnout syndrome (Chuiko, 2010; Chornopyska, 2010).

Burnout syndrome is a stressful reaction to long-term professional stress. This concept characterizes a mental state of healthy people, whose professional activities involve intensive communication when providing professional assistance within a busy and emotionally intense environment (Katkova, 2010).

J. Freudenberger (1974) defined burnout syndrome as a phenomenon, which includes the symptoms of general physical fatigue and disappointment with altruistic professions.

In our opinion, burnout syndrome is caused by emotional exhaustion due to a complicated interaction of an individual's psychological characteristics in the situations of interpersonal relationships.

The research aims to determine the level of burnout syndrome in sports educators and verify the effectiveness of the burnout syndrome psycho-correction programme.

Objectives are the following: to study the level of burnout syndrome at different stages of disease; to design both content and structure of the programme aimed at decreasing the level of sports educators' burnout syndrome; to verify the effectiveness of the designed programme.

Materials&methods

Experimental research was conducted in the Ukrainian children's centre *Moloda Hvardiia* located in Odesa. Sports educators participated in the research. In general, the research involved 60 individuals. The individuals under study were aged between 17 and 24 and gender was not considered.

In the empirical study, Boiko's methodology for identifying the level of burnout syndrome was used. It has allowed diagnosing the syndrome at different stages. Boiko's methodology includes three stages, namely, *Stress Stage*, *Resistance Stage* and *Exhaustion Stage*. Each stage includes four symptoms. Based on the index of each symptom manifestation, one can determine the stage of burnout syndrome.

With the aim to decrease the level of burnout syndrome, a correction programme has been designed. It is targeted at developing self-regulation skills, managing one's psychoemotional state, enhancing a positive attitude. The correction programme includes 13 lessons, namely, *Getting to know; What is burnout?; Emotions in our life; Our mental state; Burnout as stress; Positive thinking; Conflict: possible to avoid?; Time management; Reframing; Motivational and volitional techniques; Effective self-management in emotionally intense situations; Developing skills of assertive behaviour; Developing skills of self-regulation and self-control.*

Every lesson consists of theoretical and practical blocks. The theoretical block is aimed at developing views on burnout syndrome, its components, symptoms, stages and ways of solving it. The practical block includes methods and techniques targeted at overcoming burnout syndrome and restore emotional resources.

The obtained results of the research were statistically processed by an Excel spreadsheet with statistical functions embedded in it. The average value and level dispersion were calculated for each symptom. In the course of calculating in accordance with the selected methodology, various systems for evaluating levels, in particular, Boiko's three-stage methodology for identifying the level of burnout syndrome, was used. The average value of symptom levels was calculated as follows:

$$\bar{x} = \frac{\sum_i r_i n_i}{\sum_i n_i},$$

where r_i is numeric value of i level;

n_i is the number of individuals, who correspond to i level;

The results were summarized based on all levels of the selected methodology scale. Level dispersion was calculated as follows:

$$D = \frac{\sum_i (r_i - \bar{x})^2 n_i}{\sum_i n_i}.$$

The following ratios were calculated in order to identify whether the differences in average values of levels in relevant symptoms before the programme implementation and after its completion are deliberate or accidental:

$$t = \frac{|\bar{x}_A - \bar{x}_B|}{\sqrt{\frac{D_A}{n_A} + \frac{D_B}{n_B}}},$$

where \bar{x}_A , \bar{x}_B are average values of levels in A and B groups;

D_A and D_B are their respective dispersions;

n_A , n_B are the total number of individuals.

Assigning a 99-percent value probability of the conclusions on the differences in average values of the analyzed levels, one can obtain a critical value of the ratio $t_{sp}=2,576$, which corresponds to the assigned

probability. According to the mathematical statistics theory, when solving the inequality $t < t_{\epsilon\delta}$ one should view the differences in average values of the levels as accidental. They are deliberate provided that $t \geq t_{\epsilon\delta}$. The t-test is calculated at the level of probability value no less than 0.05. Burnout syndrome is determined by the degree of development, under development and nondevelopment.

Results

The results of the research show that the development degree of *Stress Stage* is observed in 37% of sports educators (22), the underdevelopment degree – 27% of sports educators (16), the nondevelopment degree – 36% sports educators (22) (Fig. 1). The prevailing symptom for this stage is dealing with psychologically traumatic experiences (32% – 19), which indicates that the participants often feel the influence of psychologically traumatic experiences and, therefore, stress increases and results in despair (Fig. 2). This is due to the fact that when specialists start their professional career they should undergo a period of adaptation, which is characterized by intense stress, negative feelings and anxiety. Thus, 30% of sports educators (18) deal with *anxiety and depression*, which are manifested in a sense of dissatisfaction with oneself at work, personal anxiety, disappointment in oneself and with a chosen profession. Subsequently, 28% of sports educators (17) are dissatisfied with themselves, which is manifested in self-criticism and a sense of responsibility. Interestingly, only 21% of sports educators (12) feel “backed into a corner” and are willing to change the profession. Such a feeling is a logical continuation of stress, which occurs under unfavourable and unsolvable situations. Provided that sports educators are starting to feel “backed into a corner”, it indicates their cognitive problems and inability to realize the inadequacy of their own emotional reactions to different communication situations.

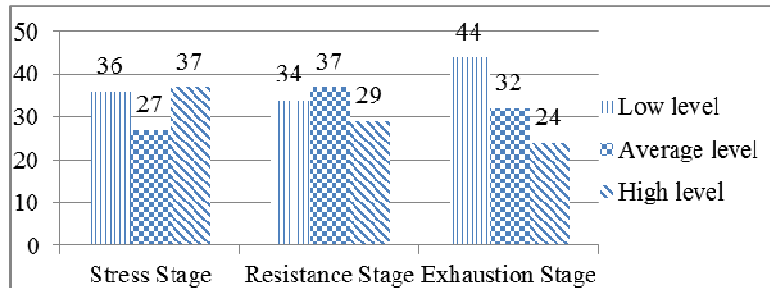


Fig. 1. Stages of burnout syndrome based on Boiko’s methodology (% of the total number of the participants)

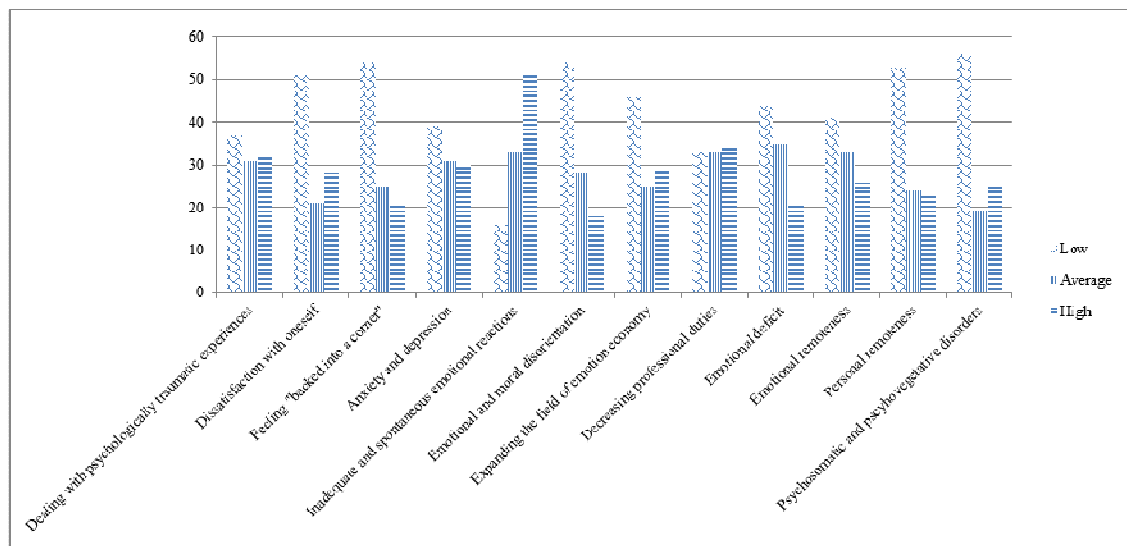


Fig. 2. Symptoms of burnout syndrome based on Boiko’s methodology (% of the total number of the participants)

As evidenced by Figures 1 and 2, the development degree of *Stress Stage* is the highest among other stages. Therefore, it can be viewed as the “trigger” mechanism in developing burnout syndrome. During *Stress Stage*, sports educators remain reserved, work hard and yet their progress decreases and behaviour changes. The specialists, who are emotionally vulnerable, self-contained, passive and disorganized, are likely to deal with this stage.

The development degree of *Resistance Stage* is observed in 29% of sports educators (17), the underdevelopment degree – 37% of sports educators (22), the nondevelopment degree – 34% of sports educators (21). The analysis of the diagram shows that the prevailing symptom of *Resistance Stage* is inadequate and spontaneous emotional reactions (51% – 31). Provided that this symptom is well-developed, specialists do not distinguish between two fundamentally different phenomena: an economical manifestation of emotions (such as a light smile, a friendly look and a soft, calm tone) and inadequate and spontaneous emotional reactions (one can pay some attention to one's partner if necessary; one can take into consideration one's partner's state and needs if one feels like doing it). Harshness, rudeness, irritability and indifference have led to "inadequate and spontaneous emotional reactions".

The reasons for such a reaction can be nondeveloped skills and abilities, which are necessary to meet professional requirements, and inconsistency of expectations, needs and values. The symptom of decreasing professional duties at a high level is observed in 34% of specialists (20). It is manifested in the attempts to simplify or decrease duties, which are rather emotionally intense. The symptom of expanding the field of emotion economy is widely common since it is observed in 29% of the participants. Such a form of protection is manifested outside the professional domain, in communication with family and friends.

The symptom of emotional and moral disorientation is observed in 18% of the participants (11) and is characterized by an inadequate attitude towards colleagues and the need for self-justification. The well-developed symptoms included emotional indifference resulting in negative emotions (irritation, sensitivity). The representatives of the professions, which involve constant communication with many people, can consciously restrain themselves from manifesting the symptoms of *Resistance Stage* during professional activities.

Based on the results of the research on three stages of burnout syndrome (see Fig. 1), the development indicator of *Resistance Stage* ranks second. This stage is triggered by mental stress. When the individual feels this stress, they strive to avoid emotional factors by a complete or partial limitation of emotional reactions to specific situations. *Resistance Stage* is developed gradually under the conditions of chronic stress.

The development degree of *Exhaustion Stage* is observed in 24% of the participants (14), the underdevelopment degree – 32% of the participants (19), the nondevelopment degree – 44% of the participants (27). *Exhaustion Stage* is characterized by a decreased overall tone of the organism and affected the nervous system. At this stage, all symptoms are developed almost at the same level.

The symptom of emotional remoteness is observed in 26% of the participants (16), psychosomatic and psychovegetative disorders – 25% of the participants (25). The symptom of emotional remoteness implies that the specialist almost completely excludes emotions from their professional activities. This proves professional deformation of personality and negatively affects communication. When sports educators cannot emotionally help the subjects of their professional activities, they strive to simplify or decrease emotionally intense duties.

The symptom of psychosomatic and psychovegetative disorders is usually manifested at the level of physical and mental well-being. As a rule, such a symptom originates because of the reaction to the interaction between the subjects of professional activities, which cause negative feelings. It is rooted in certain psychological (negative reactions, lowered mood, negative associations) and somatic (vascular reactions of insomnia, fear, aggravation of chronic diseases) discomfort. The symptom of personal remoteness is well-developed in 23% of the participants (14) and is manifested in complete or partial loss of interest in the individual. The specialists state that they are not interested in working with children. The symptom of the emotional deficit is developed in 21% of the participants (13). It is manifested in minimization of emotional contribution to work, automatism and burnout of the individual when performing professional duties. Such qualities as the unbalanced character, anxiety, reticence, insecurity and introversion contribute to developing this symptom. Sports educators start to realize that they are unable to provide their colleagues and families with emotional support. Emotional manifestations become harsh and rude, which in turn causes a negative reaction of people around them.

Upon completion of the programme, sports educators noted that it became much easier to communicate with children. In addition, their attitude toward themselves changed and positive changes in emotional and behavioural domains occurred ("I realized that I should have resolved conflicts"; "It became much easier for me to communicate with children"; "I changed my communication behaviour"; "Certain things do not bother me anymore"; "I started to respect and notice positive qualities of my colleagues, friends"; "Now I know there are no dead-end situations"; "I started to understand manifestations of negative emotions"; "I do not have so many problems now. You should always deal with problems on your own and look at situations from different angles"; "I feel more confident now".

The data of the Figure 3 show the decrease in all indicators of specialists' burnout syndrome symptoms. It mostly relates to such symptoms as *emotional and moral disorientation* (before – 0.75, after – 0.3), *feeling "backed into a corner"* (before – 0.75, after – 0.3), *expanding the field of emotion economy* (before – 1.02, after – 0.53), *decreasing professional duties* (before – 1.00, after – 0.58).

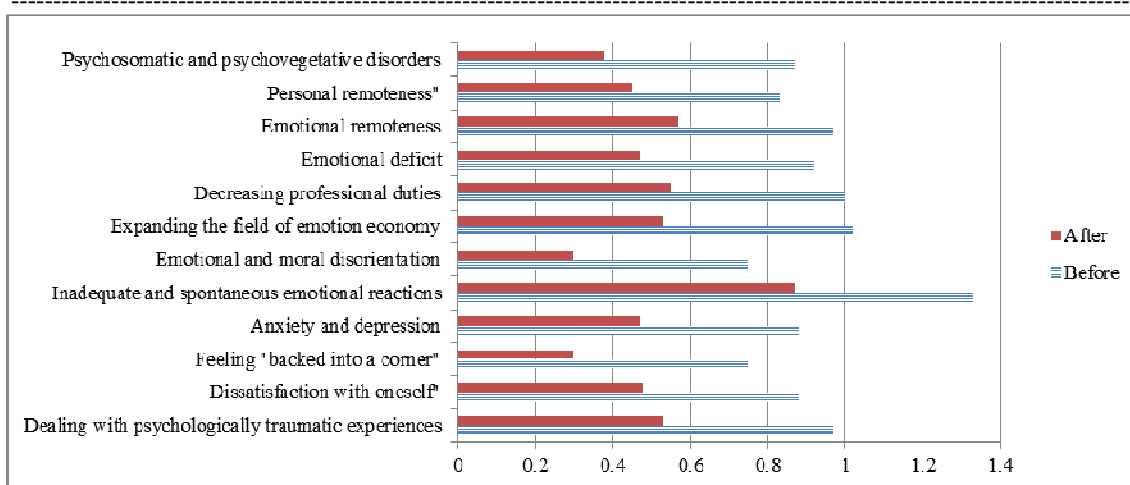


Fig. 3. Comparative indicators of burnout syndrome symptoms before the programme implementation and after its completion (average value)

Discussion

The manifestation of burnout syndrome, as well as its correction, occur at psychological level. Recognizing emotional and moral problems, understanding emotional state of one's partner decreases anxiety and depression, increases adequacy and intensity of expanding emotions in communication situations (Maksymchuk I., 2018). The ability to show positive emotions causes the communicant's positive reaction at a physical level and enhances physical and mental well-being (Halaiduik, 2018). In addition, it adjusts behaviour to respective situations and improves one's attitude toward oneself and others.

The indicator of exhaustion depends on the level of burnout syndrome. At a psychological level, burnout syndrome can cause exhaustion at physical level, which is manifested in physical discomfort, permanent fatigue and sleep disorders. Burnout syndrome results in chronic psychoemotional overstrain in professional activities.

Thus, sports educators strive to limit their professional duties and inadequacy of spontaneous emotional reactions. At a behavioural level, specialists demonstrate rather negative attitudes, for instance, "I am not going to work in the field I was trained for", "I will not work for nothing". Inconsistency between specialists' knowledge and their vision of the profession, their inability to adapt to new conditions and difficult situations result in burnout syndrome.

The results of the research confirm and complement the data of L. Pavlova (2011), who studied the specificity of burnout syndrome manifestations and concluded that the most reliable method for preventing and overcoming the syndrome is personality-oriented training. L. Pavlova (2011) believes that an important role in preventing burnout syndrome of educators is played by psychologists and their professional toolset, namely, psychodiagnostics, psychological counselling, psycho-correction, psychotherapy and psychological education.

Thus, it is imperative and socially significant to strengthen and support professional health of sports educators since well-being of novice specialists largely depends on it.

Conclusions

The level of burnout syndrome at different stages has been studied. It has been found that a great number of sports educators suffer from the syndrome.

The programme of burnout syndrome psycho-correction has been designed. It is aimed at assisting sports educators in overcoming the syndrome based on developing self-regulation skills and increasing their emotional stability. The psycho-correction programme is targeted at personality in general and their characteristics, which cause inadequate behaviour and reactions. The results of the programme application indicate the decrease in the indicators of burnout syndrome, more complete and adequate self-acceptance, more effective application of psychological protection mechanisms, regulation of inner motives; changes in structural components of burnout syndrome (increasing self-consciousness, developing a positive attitude toward oneself, developing self-regulation skills); improved relationships with friends and colleagues, tendency toward finding compromises when solving complicated issues and self-regulation skills.

As a result of the programme completion, sports educators have changed their emotional reactions to difficult situations, become interested in their behaviour. They have learned how to critically evaluate their acts, analyze manifestations of their emotions and changed their attitude toward themselves. With the aim to identify the impact of the proposed programme on overcoming burnout syndrome, the value of differences in the indicators of burnout before the programme implementation and after its completion has been analyzed.

The comparative analysis of average values during the formative experiment has revealed the dynamics toward decreasing the indicators, that reflect the manifestation level of burnout stages (Boiko's methodology). Based on the analysis of average indicators, it can be concluded that the skills developed during the programme implementation allow specialists to decrease anxiety, increase confidence in themselves and their capabilities, be less susceptible to burnout syndrome. It has been found that specialists can better control their emotions, comprehend the peculiarities of their emotional state, apply the methods for relieving emotional stress, control physical tone, which contributes to developing self-regulation skills.

Thus, the newly acquired experience of sports educators is an important factor in developing emotional self-regulation skills. It also develops certain skills connected with decision-making in stressful situations. Specialists have learned how to manage their emotions, analyze their acts and actions, which can cause burnout syndrome or contribute to its overcoming in certain situations.

The obtained results prove that if implementing the programme of burnout syndrome correction, the well-developed symptoms can be eliminated and the underdeveloped and nondeveloped symptoms can be decreased. Thus, the developed symptoms can enter the stage of developing and the symptoms under development can become nondeveloped. Sports educators have understood that any situation can be solved and dramatically changed their attitude toward psychologically traumatic situations.

So, this programme confirms the need to involve sports educators in such activities.

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