

VI International Forum on Teacher Education

Relationship of Teachers' Emotional Burnout with Life-Purpose Orientations and Copying Strategies

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Abstract

The actuality of the problem is conditioned by the transition of the Russian preschool education system to the new Federal (Russian) Educational standards of Preschool Education, which are based on the ideas of humanization and socialization of the educational process, the implementation of the principles of personalized care and education of children. This imposes greater demands on the personal resources of the educator himself/herself, which often results in emotional overloads and complications in the psychological state of the teachers, leading to professional burnout. The aim of the article is to identify the psychological features of the educators' personality that contribute to their emotional burnout. The leading method to investigate this problem is psychological testing of preschool teachers with subsequent mathematical processing of results. The article presents the results of research on the relationship between emotional burnout of teachers with life-purpose orientations and copying strategies. Based on the findings, recommendations are given for developing psychological prevention programs for burnout among preschool teachers.

Keywords: emotional burnout, life-purpose orientations, coping strategies, preschool teachers, psychological features of the teacher's personality.

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Published by Kazan federal university and peer-reviewed under responsibility of IFTE-2020 (VI International Forum on Teacher Education)

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Introduction

In the last decade, the Russian pre-school education system has made increasing demands on the teacher personality due to the introduction of the Federal Educational Standard (FES).

Preschool teachers are already the first candidates for emotional burnout due to the specifics of their profession. This is also facilitated by constant communication with a large number of children (25-35 people in the group), responsibility for their lives, the need to resolve conflict situations between children and parents, etc. With the transition to new state standards, the requirements for teachers and, consequently, the workload only increases. Real pedagogical practice shows that today it is quite clear that there is a loss of interest in a pupil as a person, a refusal to accept him/her as he/she is, and a simplification of the emotional side of professional communication. Many teachers note the presence of mental conditions that destabilize professional activity (anxiety, despondency, depression, apathy, frustration, chronic fatigue) (Barabanova, 1995; Bolotnikova & Porokh, 2016).

This makes it important to understand what personal traits and resources contribute to and inhibit the emotional burnout of preschool teachers.

Purpose and objectives of the study

The aim of the article is to the relationship between emotional burnout and life orientations and coping strategies of preschool teachers.

Literature review

Among the factors that contribute to overcome the teachers' emotional burnout, researchers identify personal characteristics such as high levels of self-actualization, sense of life and person internality (Pervitskaya, 2013), a high level of empathy and reflexivity, extroversion, democratic style of communication, and particular qualities of self-review (Vodopyanova & Starchenkova, 2008; Dolgikh & Veremchuk, 2017; Kolshko, 2014; Orlova, 2013).

According to Chudnovsky (2015), if educators have a lower level of comprehension of their life and professional activity, this leads to a large number of stress factors, which place an increased demand on such a trait of the educator's character as stress resistance. In turn, increasing or maintaining an individual's stress resistance is connected with finding and adequate use of the resources of stress resistance, which help them overcome stress situations (Lazarus, 1998).

A special category of stress resistant resources is the nature and ways of coping strategy.

Methodology

Methods of research

In the research course the following methods were used: theoretical (analysis; synthesis; concretizing; generalization); diagnostic (testing); summative assessment; methods of mathematical statistics (Spirmen's correlation coefficient).

Research experimentation facility

The research experimentation facility was Kazan (Volga Region) Federal University.

Research stages

The study of the problem was conducted in three stages:

The first stage included a theoretical analysis of existing methodological approaches, psychological and pedagogical scientific literature, and dissertations on the research problem. The problem, purpose and methods of research were identified and a plan of experimental research was drawn up.

At the second stage, diagnostic testing was carried out using Boyko's methods (2009). "Study on emotional burnout", methods of diagnostics of LPO (life-purpose orientations) by Leontiev (2000) and methods to identify copying strategies followed by mathematical processing (correlation analysis and the Student t-test). 60 preschool teachers participated in the study. The test subjects age is from 21 to 45 years old, their experience from 1 to 22 years.

At the third stage, the results obtained were analyzed and recommendations were given for the development of psychological prevention programs for the preschool teachers' emotional burnout.

Results

First stage

At the first stage of the study, it was found that increasing stresses in pedagogical activity increasingly lead to emotional burnout (Kurganova, 2013). In this regard, the question of the resources to overcome burnout arises. A number of authors consider these resources from the perspective of stress resistance, the basic characteristic of the individual (Lazarus, 1998, Chudnovsky, 2015).

In opinion of Zelenova (2005) a number of personal characteristics contribute to successful coping with stress: emotional stability and maturity, self-confidence, the need for self-actualization, the ability to control one's actions and deeds, to be responsible for everything that happens - a high level of subjective control.

The analysis of the works of Leontiev (2000), Rubinstein (2000), and Chudnovsky (2015) shows that life-purpose orientations play a leading role in ensuring the stress resistance of a person (Lukyanenko, 2016). Life-purpose orientations are characterized by the absence or presence of goals in life, which give meaning, time perspective, orientation; perception of a person of the process of his own life as interesting, emotionally filled, containing meaning; and satisfaction with the lived part of life feeling that life was lived not in vain (Leontiev, 2000).

Other researchers point out that the professional behavior of a teacher is determined by a complex of behavioral coping strategies (problem solving, search for social support, avoidance), personal and environmental (self-conception, locus of control) and cognitive (attitudes, norms of socialization) coping resources. According to their research, the development of a complex of coping strategies and coping resources is the main condition for the successful use of stress coping skills and resolving problem situations in the course of professional activity. Copying is a form of behavior that reflects a person's readiness to solve life's problems; a behavior that aims to adapt to the circumstances and that implies an already formed ability to apply specific actions to cope with stress.

Research on the relationship between educators' emotional burnout, life-purpose orientations and coping strategies is

extremely scarce, which has led to the problem and choice of research.

Second stage

At the second stage, a summative assessment in form of diagnostic testing was conducted. The test subjects were correspondence study students of the Institute of Psychology and Education of Kazan (Volga Region) Federal University. All of them were working teachers with different work experience: from 1 to 22 years. The results obtained were processed using mathematical statistics methods.

To study the syndrome of emotional burnout, as it was already mentioned above, Boyko's method (2009) "Diagnostics of emotional burnout level" was used.

The results of diagnostics of emotional burnout phases are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Diagnostic results of the emotional burnout stages of the subjects (%)

Stage	Not formed (0- 36)	In process (37-60)	Formed(over 60)
Stress	33	28	38
Resistance	20	37	43
Exhaustion	30	53	17

As can be seen, the "resistance" phase has already been formed in the largest number of subjects (43%). That means resistance to increasing stress and inclusion of protective mechanisms of struggle against it through economy of emotions in communication and simplification of professional duties.

The phase "stress" which is a harbinger and "triggering" mechanism in the formation of emotional burnout is on the second place by the number of formation (38% of the number of subjects).

The least formed phase is the "exhaustion" phase (the final phase of emotional burnout). But it has the highest indicators in the phase of formation - at 53 % of subjects.

In turn, each phase consists of 4 symptoms. Let us consider in detail which of them are the most pronounced (Table 2).

Table 2. Diagnostic results of the emotional burnout symptoms of the subjects

Symptom	H1	H2	H3	H4	P1	P2	P3	P4	И1	И2	И3	И4
Not formed	17	70	52	33	15	60	37	23	43	48	30	45
In process	22	23	23	22	40	25	23	1	37	33	37	35
Formed	10	3	8	7	15	8	3	15	5	5	17	8
Dominate	52	3	17	38	30	7	37	43	15	13	17	12

As can be seen from the data in the table and histogram, the phase of "stress" is dominated by symptoms of "experiencing psychotraumatic circumstances" (H1) and "anxiety and depression" (H4) in 52% and 38% of the subjects, respectively. This means that more than half of the subjects feel the effects of psychologically traumatic factors in the workplace. That is, the first symptom of the tension phase is H1, which means that the beginning of the emotional burnout syndrome is triggered in most teachers. And more than a third of teachers regularly feel anxious and depressed. The least formed symptoms were those of "self-satisfaction" (H2), only 3% of teachers and "caged" (H3) in 17%. This suggests that the experience of difficult circumstances and feelings about this does not lead most teachers to self-satisfaction and feelings of helplessness.

In the phase of "resistance" the dominant symptom is "reduction of professional duties" (P4) - in 43% of respondents. Close to it in importance are "expansion of the sphere of saving emotions" (P3) - 37% and "inadequate selective emotional response" (P1) - 30%. The lowest indicator for the symptom "emotional and moral disorientation" (P2) is dominated only by 7%. It can be concluded from the above that teachers cope with a situation of increased emotional load first of all through saving emotional return and striving to simplify as much as possible, reduce professional duties, remaining within the limits of professionalism, not dividing children into good and bad, remembering their pedagogical duty.

In the phase of "exhaustion", all symptoms are mostly not formed or are just beginning to form (Table 2).

From the resulting data, we can conclude that the subjects are at the stage of resisting the growing stress, looking for ways to help reduce the resulting tension. Emotional burnout has not yet become an integral attribute of the individual.

Further, in order to investigate the relationship between emotional burnout and age and life-purpose orientations, we conducted a correlation analysis of the data obtained, the results of which are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Properties of interrelation between emotional burnout symptoms and components of life-purpose orientations

	Aims in life	Life process	The life result	Locus of Control-Ego	Locus of Control - Life	Age	Length of employment
Stress stage						-,465**	-,408**
Experience psycho-traumatic conditions						-,407**	
Caged			-,338**				-,339**
Anxiety				-,342**		-,396**	-,429**
Depression						-,495**	-,375**
Resistance Stage			-,379**				
Inadequate emotional response							
Emotional and ethic diorientation							
Rise of emotional thriftiness sphere							
Professional duties reduction							
Exhaustion Stage		-,377**		-,389**		-,362**	
Emotional deficit							
Emotional detachment						-,352**	

Personal detachment				-,380**		-,348**	
Psychosomatic and psychovegetative disorders							

** - correlation is significant on a level 0,01

*- correlation is significant on a level 0,05

The data in Table 3 show that the central factor (with the largest number of correlations) is age. Moreover, age has significant inverse interrelationships with the phases of "tension," "exhaustion," and symptoms of "experiencing psychotraumatic circumstances," "anxiety and depression," emotional and personal detachment. This means that the higher the teacher's age, the less susceptible he or she is to the above factors of emotional burnout. Also, inverse correlations were found between length of service, phase of tension, and symptoms of "caged up", "anxiety and depression". In its turn, age has a direct correlation with the length of professional experience. From this we can conclude that the greater the age and length of service of a preschool teacher, the less susceptible he is to emotional burnout. Such results are quite unexpected, since studies by other authors (Gorbushin & Fedosimova, 2017) show the opposite: the more experience, the more emotional burnout indicators. Perhaps this is due to the fact that in our study the average age of the subjects is 31 years, and the experience of 6 years. As a rule, at this time the stage of professional formation and adaptation to the profession has already been passed, some specific goals have been defined, there are interests in professional activity, and mechanisms of professional self-preservation have been worked out. The emotional burnout syndrome becomes more evident after 10 years of work. This assumption is confirmed by our study of the emotional burnout properties depending on the teacher's work experience, conducted on teachers with more than 10 years of experience (Sharay, 2019).

Correlation analysis of the relation between the emotional burnout parameters and the parameters of the Leontiev's "LPO" method showed the following (Table 4): the factor with the largest number of relationships is the factor of the "Locus Ego" LPO method - "Locus Ego" (I am the master of life!) "Locus Ego" has inverse correlation with such symptoms of emotional burnout as "anxiety and depression", "personal detachment" and the phase of "exhaustion". There is also an inverse correlation between the LPO factor "life result," the phase of resistance, and the symptom of emotional burnout "trapped in a cage". There is a negative correlation between the LPO factor "life process" and the phase of "exhaustion".

It is necessary to pay attention that all factors of LPO are connected by inverse dependence with emotional burnout. And, the more a preschool teacher feels as a master of his life and can influence what happens to him, the more his life is saturated, full of meaning and the more satisfied he is with the results of his work, the less susceptible he is to emotional burnout. In other words, it can be concluded that the more meaningful life is in general, the less susceptible the teacher is to emotional burnout.

Results of the correlation analysis of parameters of emotional burnout and indicators of the "proactive copying strategy" technique are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Properties of interrelation between emotional burnout symptoms and coping strategies

	Проакт. преод	Рефлекс. Преод.	Стратег. планир	Превент. преод.	Поиск инструмен т. под.	Поиск эмоц. поддер.
Stress stage	-,425**			-,356**		
Experience psycho- traumatic conditions						
Caged						
Anxiety						
Depression	-,431**			-,455**		
Resistance Stage						
Inadequate emotional response						
Emotional and ethic diorientation						
Rise of emotional thriftiness sphere						
Professional duties reduction						0,257*
Exhaustion Stage						
Emotional deficit					,352**	
Emotional					,354**	

detachment						
Personal detachment						
Psychosomatic and psychovegetative disorders						

** - correlation is significant on a level 0,01

*- correlation is significant on a level 0,05

They show reliable negative correlations between the scales of "proactive" and "preventive" overcoming and the phase of emotional burnout "tension", the symptom of "anxiety and depression". That is, the more the teacher is determined and cares about the necessary resources to achieve the goal, is able to think about and prepare for negative variants of events' unfolding, the less susceptible he or she is to psychological tension, anxiety and depression.

There has also been a direct positive connection between the "search for instrumental support" scale and the symptoms of emotional burnout "emotional deficit" and "emotional detachment". And a positive relationship between "finding emotional support" and "reducing professional responsibilities" factors. That is, if these symptoms arise, teachers tend to seek advice or comfort.

To sum up, we can say that teachers' emotional burnout is hindered by proactive and preventive coping with stress. The search for instrumental and emotional support is associated with an increase in the level of emotional burnout, namely, symptoms such as reduction of professional duties, emotional deficit, and emotional detachment.

The third stage.

Thus, based on the results of our research, we can conclude that emotional burnout is related to the length of service and age of preschool teachers. The higher the age and, consequently, length of service, the less emotional burnout is. This suggests the importance of implementing burnout prevention programs in the early years of young teachers' work. The interrelation between emotional burnout and life-purpose orientations and the teacher's coping strategies has been revealed. According to the study, the more the life of a preschool teacher is meaningful, the more he or she thinks about himself or herself as a strong person, the less susceptible he or she is to emotional burnout. Proactive coping with stress, which includes the process of goal setting, self-regulation to achieve these goals, and preventive coping with stress, also save teachers from burning out emotionally.

The data obtained clarify the teachers' emotional burnout properties and help to build a competent program of its prevention and correction.

Discussions

The study of psychological and pedagogical literature makes it possible to state that there are no studies on the peculiarities of the relationship between emotional burnout, life-purpose orientations and coping strategies among teachers at preschool institutions. There are studies of the relationship between emotional burnout and features of the value and meaning sphere among teachers at general education schools (Lukyanenko, 2016). And research on the relationship between burnout syndrome and stress coping strategies in social workers (Rotginskaya, 2002). For effective prevention and correction of emotional burnout, in our opinion, research that helps to identify specific mechanisms underlying it among preschool teachers especially is very important.

Conclusion

The emotional burnout problem of helping professions representatives, such as kindergarten teacher, is still relevant today. Emotional burnout syndrome is "a mechanism of psychological protection developed by a personality in the form of complete or partial exclusion of emotions (reduction of their energy) in response to selected psychotraumatic effects" (Boyko, 2009). Its formation is influenced by various factors such as external (high moral responsibility, legal responsibility, tension at the workplace, etc.), as well as internal factors, such as personal characteristics of teachers, which can both prevent and promote emotional burnout. Our research has shown that the emotional burnout of preschool teachers is closely related to their life-purpose orientations. And they, in turn, are the most important element of the inner structure of the personality, which is consolidated by an individual's life experience, the totality of his or her experiences. A preschool teacher with a high sense of life, who has a clear goal and feels like the master of his or her life, is less prone to emotional burnout. A connection was also found between emotional burnout and the coping strategies used - strategies that the teacher uses in dealing with stress. The study found that the use of proactive and preventive coping strategies is inversely related to emotional burnout (one factor increases the other factor). And search of instrumental and emotional support, on the contrary, is connected with increase in parameters of emotional burnout.

To sum up, it is possible to tell that emotional burnout of preschool teachers is hindered by comprehension of life and pro-active behavior with self-support. And emotional burnout is facilitated by a preferential search for reliance on others in difficult situations and a low level of meaningful life.

It is important that the findings of this research be taken into account when designing prevention and psychological correction programs for burnout among preschool teachers.

It is especially important to prevent burnout at the first stage of professional development, in young, beginner teachers.

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