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## Stress and burnout syndrome in teachers – review of the literature

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Abstract

Teachers belong to professions particularly vulnerable to burnout. Due to level of teacher's legal and social responsibility, and impact they have on students, this occupational group is under constant research interest about burnout and coping with stress. Many analyzes indicate connection between

individual differences (coping style, emotional intelligence), working conditions, and level of burnout. This article provides review of this research.

Key words: burnout, teachers, stress

#### Introduction and purpose

Burnout is of interest of psychologists and sociologists since the 1970's. There is no uniform definition regarding this phenomenon, it is possible however to speak generally about one's extended reaction to all chronically acting emotional and interpersonal stressors at workplace. [1] therefore, about burnout is said mainly in context of directed „on people”, help professions. [2, 3]

#### Description of the state of knowledge

Teachers of all specializations belong to such profession. In Poland, thanks to The Teacher's Charter, this occupational group is covered by some privileges: smaller number of direct work hours with students, longer vacation leave on yearly basis, possible annual sick leave. [4] Those privileges seem to be justified in the context of the conducted research – still this group is particularly exposed to negative effects of prolonged stress and burnout. This article is aimed at portrayal of the factors conducting such state.

During the educational classes teachers are exposed to several health risks:

- physical speech organ overload,

- sight and vision overload,
- psychological load,
- biological risks of infectious diseases,
- chemical and physical risks,
- static load of the musculoskeletal system. [5, 6,7]

Contrary to common opinion, this profession is exposed to strictly physical as well as emotional health loads. The primary stress cause are the requirements for the individual – impossible or on the limit of possibilities. Sources of this incompilance of requirements and possibilities can be external or internal standards; too high or too low needs. [8] Due to level of teacher’s legal and social responsibility, and impact they have on students, this occupational group is under constant research interest about burnout and coping with stress. Back in the early 90s in USA the analysis of this state of affairs was conducted, given the sociological changes. Based on New York public schools teacher’s own extensive research and using data from research, public questionnaire and critical review of literature, Farber wrote about contradictions being base of american’s attitude to the teaching proffesion. Ambivalence combined with rising public criticism and low pay often hinder teaching. [9]

Teacher’s Stress and self-efficacy are consistently reposted as negatively linked and differently working on cognitive, emotional and behavioral reactions. Teacher’s stress is negatively correlated with job satisfaction and work commitment but positively correlated with burnout and exhaustion. Meanwhile self-efficacy correlated positively with job satisfaction and work commitment but negatively – with burnout and exhaustion. Skaalvik’s study tested job satisfaction, work related stress, consequences of stress and coping mechanisms among norwegian teachers. Research based on qualitative interview with working and retired teachers. Respondents report high job satisfaction (thanks to work with children, high variability at work, autonomy, teamwork and lack of monotonny), but also high levels of stress and exhaustion. As stressors they indicated time pressure, adapting teaching proces to individual student’s needs, student’s dysfunctional behaviours, conflicts at work, low social status of the profession. Teachers of different age and career stage reported same sources of work commitment and stres. However coping with stress and consequences differs at different ages among respondents. [10, 11]

Wang et al. research describes relationship between work related stress and burnout among primary and high schools’ teachers in chinese province Liaoning. High level of emotional burnout is significantly related to elevated external effort, large excess involvement. Great cynicism level is

related with small prize, excess of expectations and small support from supervisor. Lesser level of effectiveness is related to small support from coworkers and low sense of reward. [12]

Malik et. al. tested interaction of psychosocial factors and working conditions on work stress among academic teachers in Pakistan and Finland. Good working conditions, social support at workplace, and promotion and development opportunities are much better rated in Finland. Bullying at workplace occurred significantly less often in Finland than in Pakistan. Pakistani male teachers reports much higher level of bullying at workplace than any other group. Although working conditions, social support and promotion and development were better and less of bullying occurred in Finland than in Pakistan, the differences in stress between countries wasn't significant. [13]

One of the factors influencing teachers burnout is students behavior. Aloe et. al. conducted multidimensional meta-analysis testing relations between improper behavior and teachers burnout three dimensions – emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, personal achievements. Results show that students improper behavior is highly associated with burnout. Highest correlation was found between improper students behavior and emotional exhaustion of teachers, after which it followed with depersonalization and next lowered sense of personal achievements. [14]

Self-esteem and self-efficacy are tested as traits of personal resources that can protect against experiencing workload, thereby make escalation of burnout less likely. Participants of the Gastaldi's et. al. study are primary education teachers in Piedmont (Italy). Researchers tested correlation between burnout and teacher-student relations. They observed mutual influence of level of teacher's self-efficacy and level of burnout. Negative correlation between teacher's in-class self-efficacy, emotional exhaustion and depersonalization found in already mentioned Skaalvik and Skaalvik's research shows that teachers with low self-efficacy are more susceptible and in parallel the onset of burnout can weaken self-efficacy. Levels of emotional and psychological comfort is also correlated with low level of conflict perceived in relations with students. [15] In Yu, Wang, Zhai, Dai and Yang's research the workplace stress' influence on burnout was tested, focusing on verification of self-efficacy as mediator. Results show that as well as work related stress, as self-efficacy were significantly correlated with burnout. Self-efficacy partially mediates in work related stress and burnout. [16] Schwarzer and Hallum analyzed relations between self-esteem, workplace stress and burnout, focusing on mediator: self-efficacy → professional stress → burnout. The study confirmed such effect, especially for younger teachers and people with general low self-efficacy. [17]

Another factor influencing burnout is emotional intelligence. Rey, Extremera and Pena describe direct relations between emotional competences, perceived stress and burnout among hispanic teachers. Emotional competences and stress are significantly correlated with symptoms of burnout. Perceived stress is partially mediates between emotional competences and three burnout dimensions.

Those findings suggest base proces thanks to which high emotional competences may increase ability to cope with symptoms of burnout. [18] Zysberg et. al. tested the role of personal resources, work characteristic, and demographic factors in burnout among teachers, with emphasis on potential role of emotional intelligence. Results indicate that stress and emotional intelligence show stron correlations with burnout. Stress shows psitive relations and emotional intelligence moderate negative. [19]

The phenomenon of burnout among teachers is especially important due to it's potential negative influence to students. According to Shen et. al. teacher's burnout negatively influences students' motivation. Teachers' emotional exhaustion has negative impact on students' perceiving teachers support to their eutonomy and feeling of depersonalization in teachers on autonomical growth of students' motivation. [20] Herman et. al. described relationship of teachers' burnout with studnts' results, including destructive behaviors and learning achievements. Teachers in high stress group, high burnout and low coping are connected with worst students' school results. [21] Oberle and Schoners-Reichl show that influence of burnout level in teachers on children reflects also on their phisical symptoms of stress. Morning levels of cortisol in tested children is significantly different in individual classes (variability 10%). Higher level of teachers' burnout significantly provides variability of morning cortisol. [22]

#### Summary

In connection with the above report sit is worth to take in depth care of burnout and workplace teachers' stress and especially to try to elaborate it's prevention. This phenomenon is common and worldwide, negatively influencing teachers as well as their students.

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