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PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF WORK: BURNOUT AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

Job burnout is one of the consequences of work. Its appearance is conditioned by a variety of factors that are to a great extent linked with attitudes and behaviours of the workers and their way of functioning and to some extent with the culture of the surrounding people. The first part of the article provides characteristics of the phenomenon of burnout. The second part is a review of research that reveals the scope of the issue. The analysis of relationships between burnout and the predisposing and preventive factors has been omitted. The third part is devoted to an analysis of the consequences of burnout from different perspectives.

Keywords: *job burnout, emotional exhaustion, health, consequences of work.*

For an employed person with the statutory 8 hour-working day, work constitutes approximately one fourth of their everyday activity. Owing to work, the human being can satisfy numerous needs including finances, safety, a sense of belonging, acceptance, development, social contacts and much more. Naturally, not each human being fully satisfies or achieves all the above. According to the research carried out by the Public Opinion Research Centre, almost three quarters of the respondents (71%) are of the opinion that work is mainly a means of obtaining money¹; whereas almost half of them (47%), to various extents, agree that a job does not have to be fulfilling and its most important aspect are satisfactory material benefits. The factor analysis carried out by the author confirms the existence of two different approaches to work. The first one is an attitude based on auto-

¹*Stosunek Polaków do pracy i pracowitości*, Komunikat z badań Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej BS/38/2011, Warsaw, April, 2011, p. 2-6.

telic values; it is an ethos of work. It is comprised of the following convictions: it is worth being hardworking, work brings meaning to life, carrying out one's duties will pay off sooner or later. This attitude is also expressed by a conviction that it is worth doing one's job with all one's heart, even if it is not of particular significance, that hard work is an essential condition of success in life and also that work is a moral duty of the human being towards oneself and others. The research shows that both attitudes towards one's job and hard work – both the autotelic and the instrumental ones – are to a certain extent connected with each other which makes it difficult to distinguish a particular type of person who is represented in the two approaches².

Job burnout can be understood in a variety of manners. Freudenberg and Richelson, known as forerunners of research on this phenomenon, while defining it in one of their publications point to a "state of fatigue or frustration brought about by devotion to a cause, way of life, or relationship that failed to produce the expected reward."³ Christina Maslach, the author of the Maslach Burnout Inventory questionnaire for research on job burnout, defines job burnout as follows:

[...] a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who do 'people work' of some kind. Emotional exhaustion refers to feelings of being emotionally overextended and depleted of one's emotional resources by one's work. Depersonalization refers to a negative, callous, excessively detached or dehumanized response to other people, who are usually the recipients of one's services or care. Reduced personal accomplishment refers to feelings of incompetence and successful achievement in one's work⁴.

Maslach's research resulted in a classification of the symptoms of job burnout in three areas:

- emotional exhaustion,
- excessive dehumanisation,
- lack of personal accomplishment derived from the result of one's work.

²Ibidem, p. 2-6.

³Freudenberger Herbert. J., Richelson Géraldine, *Burnout: The High Cost of High Achievement*, Garden City, NY, Doubleday, 1980, p.13.

⁴Maslach Christina, *Wypalenie – w perspektywie wielowymiarowej*, [in:] Sęk Helena (ed.), *Wypalenie zawodowe. Przyczyny, mechanizmy, zapobieganie*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2000, p. 15.

Also Robert Gołembiewski assumes three components of burnout; however, the order of symptoms is different, more in line with Czesław Noworol's and Tadeusz Marek's where the modification lies in the focus on the individualisation of the process of job burnout. Gołembiewski is the author of the 8-stage model of burnout emergence with a border value for each stage between a low (L) and a high (H) level of burnout. By contrast, Noworol and Marek point to the fact that each person has got their own individual pattern of burnout and each can be assigned to a group of people of the same level of burnout. They also highlight the progressive character of the symptom as each level involves more acute and harmful symptoms⁵.

In her initial works Christina Maslach also highlights that people who work in human related services suffer from the phenomenon of job burnout, associating stress with job burnout. Analysing this phenomenon in the broader professional sense is a significant change in her approach. She assumes that there is a continuum on whose ends there is engagement, i.e. energy and readiness to cooperate, effectiveness and burnout understood as cynicism, insufficient activity⁶.

Maslach originally pointed towards the so-called human related services, such as: doctors, nurses, teachers and social workers who are the most vulnerable to job burnout. However, the author tries to design a more universal model of job burnout under the influence of the research by Litter and Byrne on the structure of the burnout process, the individual and organisational and structural factors. She has assumed a new thesis in which she places the causes of job burnout in the relationship between the human being and professional work⁷. According to this model, the basic conditions of work that lead to burnout are easily discernable. Assuming the above, job burnout derives from an excessive workload, lack of possibilities to control and make decisions with respect to the fulfilled roles, insufficient compensation, lack of justice and experiencing clashes of values. Maslach characterises the causes in the following way:

- too great a workload,
- lack of control and co-decision making,

⁵Terelak Jan, *Psychologia stresu*, Oficyna Wydawnicza Branta, Bydgoszcz 2001, p. 317.319.

⁶Tucholska Stanisława, *Christiny Maslach koncepcja wypalenia zawodowego*, Przegląd Psychologiczny, vol. 44 no. 3, PTP Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL, Lublin 2001, p. 306-307.

⁷Ibidem, p. 307.

- insufficient compensation,
- a break up of the community,
- injustice,
- clash of values

The particular forms of maladjustment are co-dependent and can condition one another. It is worth noticing that in Maslach's view, burnout is not treated as a form of mental pathology; it is not conditioned by a personality defect or clinical syndrome. In fact, it assumes that burnout, which was originally a work-related phenomenon, can become a clinical problem⁸.

As far as Polish research on burnout is concerned, Helena Sęk assumes a social perspective from cognitive psychology in order to explain the phenomenon of job burnout⁹. The theoretical assumptions of the model developed by her are linked with the ones introduced by Maslach. It alludes to the cognitive and transactional theory of stress by Lazarus. With such bases the theory thus developed focuses on the subjective evaluation of the stressors and one's own resources in the process of job burnout emergence. The author points to a wide scope of causes, starting with the stress that is objectively present at work to the stress that derives from macro-social reasons, e.g. from political and economic reforms. If they culminate, situations in life can be interpreted in terms of challenge, threat, loss. Significant stress can also appear as a result of the confrontation of professional requirements and previous expectations. A human being tries to reduce the level of stress, disappointment, frustration, the feeling of lack of success, the feeling of a threat and loss in professional life, by individual mechanisms and strategies. If one's own competence to handle these situations, are judged as insufficient, then this leads to the development of job burnout.

The basis of the existential conception of job burnout by Ayala M. Pines was that, thanks to work, people feel important and needed. The people who are at greatest risk of burnout demand a lot from themselves and have ambitious professional goals. If we treat burnout as the ultimate stage of a process, then excessive motivation and engagement is its initial stage. Pines writes,:

If you don't feel engaged in your cause, if you work with people but don't take care of them, if you are not emotionally engaged in your work - then it is unlikely that you

⁸Ibidem, p. 310-311.

⁹Sęk Helena, *Uwarunkowania i mechanizmy wypalenia zawodowego w modelu społecznej psychologii poznawczej*, [in:] Sęk Helena (ed.), *Wypalenie zawodowe. Przyczyny, mechanizmy, zapobieganie*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2000, p. 83-112.

will suffer from burnout. However, if you are devoted to your job and emotionally engaged in it, if you expect to seek meaning of your life in your work – and you feel that you have failed, then you are a good candidate for burnout¹⁰.

The author understands the relationship between burnout and stress in such a way that stress can but does not have to be a cause of the appearance of job burnout; it will be so if the person that engages in some work approaches it with excessive ambitions, has got lofty goals and enters a stressful environment in which there is immense stress and irreducible obstacles, whereas the challenges that are set for that person are beneath their expectations. Such a person does not obtain possibilities, means or authority that they need in order to reach their goal. Instead the feeling of failure sets in and leads to the appearance of burnout. However, for people who feel that their work has got significant meaning even a high level of stress will not cause job burnout.

In The International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems ICD-10, job burnout is subsumed under the category of “External causes of morbidity and mortality. Factors influencing health status and contact with health services”, code Z73.0.

In the course of my research I have been unable to find any statistics that show how many patients in Poland have been diagnosed with job burnout. Nevertheless, for this purpose we can consult psychological research on burnout. Nina Ogińska-Bulik carried out extensive research with the use of the Maslach Burnout Inventory questionnaire¹¹. She categorised the study participants according to the level of job burnout using the data clustering method in which the most outstanding factor is emotional exhaustion¹².

The lowest level of job burnout was observed in the drivers of public transportation with the highest level present in 42,9% of respondents, and the mean level 54,9¹³. One of the highest levels was observed in security officers – high levels in half of the respondents. The highest result was also observable for the particular aspects of burnout: emotional exhaus-

¹⁰Pines Ayala M., *Wypalenie – w perspektywie egzystencjalnej*, [in:] Sęk Helena (Ed.), *Wypalenie zawodowe. Przyczyny, mechanizmy, zapobieganie*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2000, p. 32-57.

¹¹Ogińska-Bulik Nina, *Stres zawodowy w zawodach usług społecznych*, Wydawnictwo Difin, Warszawa 2006, p. 202-224.

¹²Ibidem, p. 150-151.

¹³Ibidem, p. 219.

tion and dehumanization¹⁴. In another professional group, that of municipal policemen, a higher level of burnout was observed for 18,3% of respondents. The emotional exhaustion and dehumanization levels were similar to the previous group; however, there was a significantly low level of personal accomplishment. The mean level of burnout among municipal policemen was 49,58¹⁵. Yet a higher level of burnout was discovered in 41,4% of taxi drivers (with a mean level of 49,04) and 41,7% in probation officers (with a mean level of 45,50)¹⁶. In the group of medical rescuers a high level of burnout was noted in 35% of the respondents. Group-internal differences between doctors and medical rescuers in the capacity of paramedics were noted for emotional exhaustion. In comparison with other professional groups, medical rescuers had a comparatively greater feeling of personal achievement¹⁷. A relatively high percentage of people with a high level of burnout was found in the group of teachers, right up to 30%, similarly managers, who apart from that also experienced a greater feeling of job satisfaction¹⁸.

Within the group of policemen analysed by Nina Ogińska-Bulik up to 25,7% was included in the group with a higher level of burnout (with the mean level of 47,7). It turned out that policemen were more emotionally exhausted than fire fighters though less than security officers. On the scale of dehumanization they scored significantly higher than fire fighters, bank workers and actors but lower than security officers. As for the third aspect of burnout, the feeling of personal accomplishment, the policemen scored lower than security officers, paramedics, managers, journalists and actors. The author of this research notices that there were in-group differences for policemen who work in different departments. Members of anti-terrorist units and criminal investigation and detective departments experience greater emotional exhaustion and dehumanization. Whereas on the scale of a sense of personal achievement, lower scores were obtained by transport policemen than those from criminal investigation and detective departments and antiterrorist units¹⁹.

¹⁴Ibidem, p. 207-208.

¹⁵Ibidem, p. 149, 209-210.

¹⁶Ibidem, p. 149, 217-218.

¹⁷Ibidem, p. 211.

¹⁸Ibidem, p. 213.

¹⁹Ibidem, p. 201-204.

Among the journalists 21,7% of respondents had higher burnout levels. There were no differences as far as emotional exhaustion and dehumanization are concerned²⁰.

An increased level of job burnout was observed in 16.7% of bank workers, with a mean level of 37,7, which was one of the lowest in this study²¹. Among the fire fighters an increased level of burnout was present in 8,6% (with a mean level of 35,9). It referred mostly to the level of emotional exhaustion and dehumanization which was on the lowest level among all the professionals in this study. As far as the sense of personal accomplishment is concerned, it was comparable to other professions²². Similarly, a relatively low level of burnout was observed in the group of prison officers, with increased levels among 11% of respondents²³. The lowest level of burnout was noted among actors, though still with increased levels in 16,7% of respondents.²⁴

The study on job burnout among 140 permanent soldiers carried out by Izabela Tomaszewska using the Strength Burnout Scales showed that burnout in this group was at a regular level. The soldiers that took part in the study moderately distanced themselves from other people, from the participation in the tasks and contacts with others. There was also an average incidence of narrowing the possibilities of effective coping with professional tasks, lack of self-confidence and lack of strength²⁵.

The research on doctors carried out by Tomasz Świdorski, Dorota Langer, Hanna Popkowska-Zerbin using MBI, showed that they (N=69) scored similarly to the ones from Maslach's sample in the US²⁶. Comparing the scores to American norms, the doctors in the Polish study experience an average level of emotional exhaustion, slightly higher level of dehumanization, and slightly higher level of personal accomplishment. These are the following mean results for emotional exhaustion 20,25 (SD - 12,33), dehumanization 7,17 (SD - 7,25), job satisfaction, 37,49 (SD - 8,60).

²⁰Ibidem, p. 221.

²¹Ibidem, p. 214.

²²Ibidem, p. 204-205.

²³Ibidem, p. 206.

²⁴Ibidem, p. 223.

²⁵Tomaszewska Izabela, *Wypalenie w służbie żołnierza zawodowego. Wybrane zagadnienia*, P.W. GLOB Studium Kształcenia Ustawicznego, Olsztyn 2006, p. 52-53.

²⁶Świdorski Tomasz, Langer Dorota, Popkowska-Zerbin Hanna, *Wypalenie zawodowe a poczucie koherencji u lekarzy*, Nowiny Psychologiczne 3, 1999, p. 69-74.

Marta Anczewska carried out a study on the level of stress and job burnout among the workers of psychiatric health care²⁷. Using Maslach Burnout Inventory she measured their level of emotional exhaustion, dehumanization and level of personal accomplishment, and it turned out that it is no different from the mean values for all workers of the health care system and gives evidence for an average level of job burnout. The mean scores were as follows: emotional exhaustion 17,84 (SD - 10,78), dehumanization 4,79 (SD - 3,99), a sense of personal accomplishment 32,45 (SD - 8,24).

Ewa Wilczek-Rużyczka obtained similar scores among nurses and doctors investigating a group of 666 health care workers²⁸. The results from her study are as follows: mean emotional exhaustion 19,91 (SD - 11,26), dehumanization 7,41 (SD - 5,55), a sense of personal accomplishment 30,78 (SD - 8,42).

Other studies, carried out by Helena Sęk et al., on a group of nurses who work in obstetric, paediatric, oncologic, surgical, internal medicine, and intensive care wards, chief nurses, early school, primary school and high school teachers show the following results²⁹. The mean global level of burnout was 36,23 (SD - 16,46), the results from particular parts: emotional exhaustion 20,42 (SD - 10,08), dehumanization 4,11 (SD - 4,21), reversed result on the personal engagement scale 11,70 (SD - 7,48)³⁰.

Job burnout has also been investigated among social workers in the study carried out in the Institute for the Development of Social Services³¹. The data for this study was collected by means of a tool developed by the authors, which was based on a 3-point scale of job burnout. Thus obtained results show that there is no job burnout among 50% of participants; 48% experienced a low level of burnout, categorised as 1st degree burnout. 2% of the population experienced 2nd and 3rd degree burnout.

²⁷Anczewska Marta, *Stres i wypalenie zawodowe u pracowników psychiatrycznej opieki zdrowotnej*, Instytut Psychiatrii i Neurologii, Warszawa 2006, p. 70-71.

²⁸Wilczek-Rużyczka Ewa, *Wypalenie zawodowe a empatia i lekarzy i pielęgniarek*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Kraków 2008, p. 113-114.

²⁹Pasikowski Tomasz, *Charakterystyka próby i metody badawcze* [in:] Sęk Helena, (ed.) *Wypalenie zawodowe. Psychologiczne mechanizmy i uwarunkowania*, Zakład Wydawniczy K. Domke, Poznań 1996, p. 27.

³⁰Sęk Helena, Pasikowski Tomasz, *Analiza wyników* [in:] w Sęk Helena (ed.), *Wypalenie zawodowe. Psychologiczne mechanizmy i uwarunkowania*, Zakład Wydawniczy K. Domke, Poznań 1996, p. 43.

³¹Szmagałski Jerzy, *Stres i wypalenie zawodowe pracowników Socjalnych*, Instytut Rozwoju Służb Społecznych, Warsaw 2009, p. 58-62.

The consequences of job burnout can be analysed from a number of points of view: (1) the person suffering from the syndrome, (2) their relatives, (3) their superiors or co-workers, (4) clients, (5) patients, (6) inquirer, (7) and also from the point of view of the state that covers the cost of treating the syndrome. It can be assumed that these consequences have a financial side, similarly to somatic diseases. For the purpose of this article I focus on the consequences for the state, employers and the person suffering from the syndrome. The American Institute of Stress announces that 26% of people who work experience burnout due to work-related stress. Whereas the losses in the American economy due to stress in the workplace has reached 300 billion dollars per year³². The employers bear costs that result from a decrease in the employees' quality of work, their effectiveness, absences, resignation from work and the necessity of training new employees, weakened communication between employees, mistakes, client's resignation from the services of the company due to the decreased level in service quality or, for example, dehumanization. In the case of state institutions, or more specifically governmental units, such as schools, state hospitals or other units included in the budget, these costs are covered by the state budget. It is easy for the costs to become obscured; whereas the estimation of loss due to a prolonged task realization time can be difficult. The stronger the burnout, the lower the motivation to work. Negative feedback kicks in and the reluctance to work is deepened and ultimately leads to resignation from work³³.

The information obtained via email from the Social Security Institution shows that the expenses resulting from all the benefits due to incapability to work in 2009, code Z.73 (problems with hardships in life: burnout, personality, lack of relaxation and free time, social maladjustment not coded elsewhere, social conflicts not coded elsewhere, limitation of activity due to the incapability, other problems resulting from hardships in life, undefined) amounted to 239,600zł. More detailed statistics are not kept. These are the expenses connected with incapability to work. It does not include the costs of medication refunds, health care or psychological aid. Costs connected with treating diseases or psychosomatic disorders resulting from or being consequen-

³²<http://www.stress.org/job.htm> (date of access: 30.05.2011).

³³PinesAyala M., *Wypalenie – w perspektywie egzystencjalnej*, [in:] Sęk Helena (ed), *Wypalenie zawodowe. Przyczyny, mechanizmy, zapobieganie*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2000, p. 32-57.

ces of job burnout or work-related stress are not included in the above either.

The research on job burnout from a medical perspective as well as determining the epidemiological scale of the phenomenon can raise doubts. First of all, the estimation of the phenomenon is done by means of soft data, which means data that are gathered from the patient's own description of it³⁴. Working with such data in order to define the exact epidemiology is more difficult than with hard data. However, the approach to the continuum of health/ disease is more and more often approached from the point of view of the patient in which their well-being or difficulties in functioning can constitute that point of reference. Job burnout usually begins secretly and the person that suffers from it does not notice it. The symptoms increase and the work becomes less and less effective. They seek reasons for it in external factors and not in their own incapability of handling the situation at hand. The clients of people suffering from burnout notice its effects and experience negative feelings during contact with such people, thus leading to a negative evaluation of the employee³⁵. The employee experiences real suffering due to burnout. They feel emotionally empty and overwhelmed during contacts with other people also in a private context. They also feel as if they were losing their personality. Paranoid and neurotic reactions, depression or even suicidal thoughts may also appear³⁶. Its symptoms bring consequences in terms of both economic costs of treatment of burnout as well as associated psychosomatic diseases and addictions, absences from work and job loss.

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³⁴ Puchalski Krzysztof, *Metody sondażowe i miękkie dane w badaniach zbiorowości*, [in:] Jerzy Bzdęga, Anita Gębska-Kuczerowska, *Epidemiologia w zdrowiu publicznym*, 2010, Wydawnictwo Lekarskie PZWL, Warszawa 2010, p. 64-82.

³⁵ Sęk Helena, *Uwarunkowania i mechanizmy wypalenia zawodowego w modelu społecznej psychologii poznawczej*, [in:] Sęk Helena (ed.), *Wypalenie zawodowe. Przyczyny, mechanizmy, zapobieganie*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2000, p. 83-112.

³⁶ Schuh Horst, Litzcke Sven, *Stres, mobbing i wypalenie zawodowe*, Gdańskie Wydawnictwo Psychologiczne, Gdańsk 2007, p. 170-171.