

Burnout or Professional Burnout Syndrome in education workers

El Burnout o Síndrome de desgaste profesional en trabajadores de la educación

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ABSTRACT

Teaching is recognized as one of the most demanding jobs due to the vast amount of information that teachers must assimilate, analyze and transmit on a daily basis. However, beyond this intellectual challenge, one of the greatest challenges lies in managing the interpersonal relationships necessary to impart knowledge effectively. Educators are constantly under pressure because of the vital importance of education in society. Working with people, whether colleagues, students or parents, adds an additional layer of complexity and emotional responsibility. This constant interaction can lead to the development of "Burnout Syndrome", also known as Burnout, which can have devastating emotional and psychological consequences for the individual. Burnout can lead to emotional disconnection from work, and even permanent separation from work. In the most severe cases, it can trigger clinical conditions that significantly affect the teacher's health. The purpose of this article is to show the influence of this syndrome, basing the research on a literature review on this topic under a qualitative methodology.

Keywords: Burnout, stress, education, educational institution, health, emotions

RESUMEN

La labor docente es reconocida como una de las más exigentes debido a la vasta cantidad de información que los docentes deben asimilar, analizar y transmitir diariamente. Sin embargo, más allá de este desafío intelectual, uno de los mayores retos radica en el manejo de las relaciones

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interpersonales necesarias para impartir conocimientos de manera efectiva. Los educadores se encuentran constantemente bajo una presión derivada de la vital importancia que la educación tiene en la sociedad. El trabajo con personas, ya sean colegas, estudiantes o padres de familia, añade una capa adicional de complejidad y responsabilidad emocional. Esta interacción constante puede conducir al desarrollo del "Síndrome de estar quemado en el trabajo", también conocido como Burnout, el cual puede tener consecuencias devastadoras tanto a nivel emocional como psicológico para el individuo. El Burnout puede llevar a la desconexión emocional del trabajo, e incluso a la separación permanente del mismo. En los casos más graves, puede desencadenar condiciones clínicas que afectan significativamente la salud del docente. El presente artículo tiene como finalidad mostrar la influencia de este síndrome, basando la investigación en una revisión bibliográfica sobre este tema bajo una metodología cualitativa.

Palabras clave: Burnout, estrés, educación, institución educativa, salud, emociones

INTRODUCTION

Burnout or Burnout Syndrome, also known as Professional Burnout Syndrome, is the consequence of a combination of psychosocial factors that have psychological, emotional and physiological repercussions. The term burnout comes from English and means exhaustion or mental exhaustion. It was coined in 1974 by the American psychologist Herbert Freudenberg (Velez, 2016, p. 51). It is produced by exposure to chronic stress, but in turn differs from it in certain aspects. "It is characterized by a state of emotional exhaustion, a cynical or detached attitude toward work, and a sense of inefficiency" (Maslach, C., Schaufeli, W. B., & Leiter, M. P., 2001). Due to the damage it can cause and the number of people who suffer from it, it was included in the WHO's international list of diseases.

Cases of burnout are more frequent in health, education and other services that require human contact, although it can also be suffered by people who perform other tasks, such as writers and even housewives. The reason that this syndrome manifests itself mainly in this group shows that the social factor is a determining cause, and includes an important ideological component, resulting from the relationship between the values and expectations of the worker and the work environment.

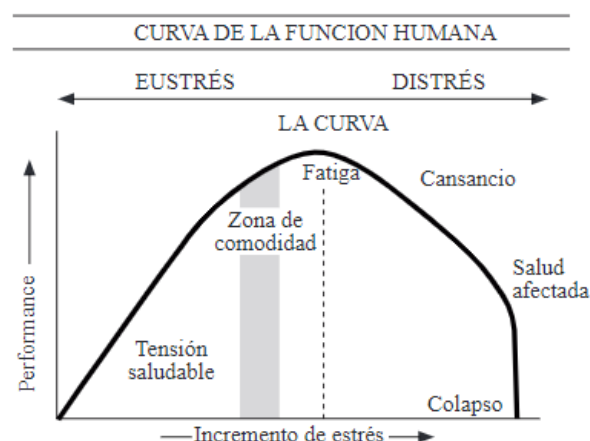
Teaching, due to the importance of education for the development of any society, is a profession that requires a high degree of responsibility and dedication, so that, almost always, the teacher is a teacher by vocation. Educating requires skills that go beyond the mastery of the subject being taught; it entails planning skills, mastery of teaching techniques and methods, leadership and an emotional and interpersonal intelligence that allows dealing with people and solving problems. In addition to these demands, the educational process is carried out in an institutional context with its own economic, organizational and cultural characteristics, which come into play to shape the so-called educational environment.

In this context, unpleasant situations may arise that affect teachers. The relationship established between the teacher's characteristics and the institution's guidelines influences the degree of comfort, approval and motivation, and therefore has repercussions on the teacher's performance and the quality of education. For these reasons, the study of this topic is relevant.

Zavala (2008) defines the term stress from different perspectives and divides the concept into two moments of suffering, one positive and the other negative, both resulting from the individual-environment relationship. The first moment, called eustress, comes from the effective adaptation of the individual to an environmental demand, and the second moment, or distress, derives from the failure of such adaptation.

Conditions arrive in the distress phase, when the situation exceeds the individual's ability to adapt to it, the first phase being positive and even motivating. This definition breaks with the popular belief that stress is a negative condition in its entirety. Figure 1 describes the general process under increasing stress.

Figure 1. Human function curve



Source: Zavala (2008, p. 69).

Regarding work stress (Leka, Griffiths, & Cox, 2004, p. 3) defines it as "the reaction that the individual may have to work demands and pressures"; further on they express that "stress is the result of the imbalance between the demands and pressures faced by the individual (...) stress tests the individual's ability to cope with his activity". It can be seen that this definition is not divorced from Zavala's, since it does not conceive stress as a negative response, but takes into account all its phases when assessing a worker's ability to cope with an activity.

Therefore, stress can be defined as the relationship between the individual and the environment where the former's capacity to adapt to the demands of the latter is put to the test. When this capacity becomes deficient, the individual may feel overwhelmed by such demands and suffer psychological, emotional and even physiological discomfort. Burnout or Burnout at Work Syndrome (BWS), also called Professional Burnout or Emotional Exhaustion Syndrome, is, effectively, a response of the individual to situations of chronic stress, therefore, it is a consequence of the condition defined above in an advanced stage of distress. As mentioned above, it occurs most frequently in jobs that require human social contact and is characterized by a feeling of apathy, burnout and loss of motivation. Burnout syndrome is often confused with depression, but the former is manifested only by the situation that triggers it and the agents involved, while the latter is an almost permanent state of apathy and discouragement.

According to (Velez, 2016, p. 51) burnout syndrome "describes a psychological state that appears after a prolonged period of exposure to psychosocial risk factors"; the same author defines, based on cases of burnout in health care workers, three dimensions that characterize it:

Emotional fatigue or loss of emotional resources to cope with the job.

Depersonalization or development of negative attitudes and cynicism towards patients.

Low personal achievements or tendency to negatively evaluate one's own work with low professional self-esteem appraisals

Although symptoms may vary according to the person and the context, these characteristics are the most frequent.

Martínez Pérez (2010), in an article for Vivat Academia, differentiates between burnout and general stress:

General stress and Burnout syndrome are easily distinguished because the former is a psychological process that entails positive and negative effects, while Burnout only refers to negative effects for the subject and his environment. It is clear that general stress can be experienced in all possible areas of human life and activity, unlike Burnout, which, as most authors believe, is a syndrome exclusive to the work context. (Martínez Pérez, 2010, p. 47).

The author distinguishes between these two conditions on the basis of two criteria: conceptual breadth and scope of action. In terms of breadth, she recognizes that stress is a more encompassing term, since it includes, as seen above, phases and has both

negative and positive repercussions, while burnout is essentially negative. According to the scope of action, stress can appear at any time and place in the life of the human being, being the natural response to environmental threats, and burnout, on the other hand, is an exclusively occupational condition.

In conclusion, burnout is a particular manifestation of advanced stage stress. A stressed person can be easily distinguished from a "burned-out" person by his or her attitude towards the work he or she performs, the latter being apathetic, cynical and unmotivated, so it is almost inevitable that he or she will have poor work performance and the quality of his or her work will be affected.

According to Gonzalez (2015, p. 3), who cites Jerry Edelmich and Archie Brodsky (1980), there are four phases before acquiring burnout syndrome:

- Enthusiasm Phase
- The worker is enthusiastic about the work, in which he spends a lot of energy and does not protect himself from disappointment.
- Stagnation Phase
- The employee observes that his or her expectations are not being met
- Frustration Phase
- As work failures accumulate, the worker experiences a constant feeling of failure that renders him inactive.
- Apathy Phase
- As a consequence of constant frustrations, there is an absence of positive feelings.

It is presented in Table I, according to Martínez Pérez (2010, p. 61).

Table 1. Symptoms of Burnout Syndrome by domain.

EMOCIONALES	COGNITIVOS	CONDUCTUALES	SOCIALES
Depresión.	Pérdida de significado.	Evitación de responsabilidades	Evitación de contactos.
Indefensión.	Pérdida de valores.	Absentismo.	Conflictos interpersonales.
Desesperanza.	Desaparición de expectativas.	Conductas inadaptativas.	Malhumor familiar. Aislamiento
Irritación.	Modificación autoconcepto	Desorganización.	Formación de grupos críticos.
Apatía.	Desorientación cognitiva.	Sobreimplicación.	Evitación profesional.
Desilusión.	Pérdida de la creatividad	Evitación de decisiones.	
Pesimismo.	Distracción.	Aumento del uso de cafeína, alcohol, tabaco y drogas.	
Hostilidad.	Cinismo.		
Falta de tolerancia.	Criticismo Generalizado.		
Acusaciones a los clientes.			
Supresión de sentimientos.			

Teaching is ranked as one of the most stressful professional activities. Table 2 shows the percentage of cases of clinical burnout by profession.

Table 2. Levels of clinical burnout by professions

Voluntarios	13.9%	Obreros	6.5%
Médicos en atención hospitalaria	11.3%	Trabajadores de la construcción	6.1%
Docentes	9.0%	Oficiales de prisión	3.4%
Médicos clínicos	8.2%	Gendarmes	3.3%
Enfermeras hospitalarias	7.8%	Enfermeras de oncología	1.7%
Parteras	6.6%	Policía	0.8%

Source: Taken from (Gonzalez, 2015, p. 18).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present work was carried out from a qualitative approach, since, although some statistical data are handled, the subject matter revolves around a problem of a social nature, making the application of qualitative techniques such as interviews and document analysis more convenient. Bibliographic-documentary research was also used as a method of data collection, through reliable sources such as books, scientific articles, documents, websites, among others, which were selected based on the central idea of the syndrome in the presence of the educational and professional sector.

The case study was the research technique chosen to carry out this work. The case of a teacher from an educational unit in Mitad del Mundo, who suffers from burnout and whose name will not be revealed because she decided to remain anonymous, was taken as a sample. To collect the information, an interview of ten open-ended questions was applied to the teacher, focused on determining the factors that cause the condition of the subject/object of study and with the purpose of contrasting the theory collected with a real situation. The answers were recorded on a smartphone and later transcribed accurately.

Interview questions

What are your expectations with your teaching work?

What is the reality of your teaching work?

How many hours per week do you dedicate to curricular activities and how many hours per week to extracurricular activities?

What activities do you consider unnecessary or requiring more effort than is really important? Examples

How is your relationship with your co-workers?

Is there cooperation between the teachers of the different areas when carrying out the teaching-learning process? Argument

How is your relationship with your superiors?

How does bureaucracy and institutional hierarchy affect your teaching?

How is your relationship with students and parents?

What physiological symptoms have you noticed since suffering this professional burnout?

RESULTS

The bibliographic research was carried out successfully, obtaining valuable information on the topic studied. Data was collected from scientific articles, books and specialized websites, and these, in turn, provided other secondary sources of great heuristic value, all of which are included in the references section.

The case study did not have any inconveniences either. The teacher was willing to collaborate with the research, answering all questions and concerns with total sincerity. The following are the interview questions and answers:

What were your expectations when you started teaching at the institution?

My expectations were the same as always: to work hard for the welfare of the students, to make the educational process as pure, strong and scientific as possible, to create in the students a love for science, to instill in them good habits and values. The same as I have always expected from my job.

What is the current reality of your teaching work?

There was a stage, at the beginning, when I thought that what was happening was a product of the normal process of adaptation, but with time I understood that the reality was different. I found myself with an institution that was structurally very well formed, but, unfortunately, what is really important, which is the teaching-learning process, that students learn, is neglected. More priority is given to parental criteria, advertising, the school's image, and the last card in the deck is the class, the quality of education.

How many hours per week do you dedicate to curricular activities and how many hours per week to extracurricular activities?

It is impressive the load of extracurricular activities that we teachers have. I do not disagree with this type of activities, because they also influence the student's integral development; but they are not the main part of the process. The class shifts, in the virtual modality, are very short and I have had to dedicate a good part of those shifts to these activities: taking pictures and videos to upload to the school's Facebook, informing students of things they should already know, I have lost entire classes; not to mention the amount of documents and unnecessary planning that disassociate the teacher from his main task, which is teaching.

What activities do you consider unnecessary or requiring more effort than is really important? Examples

For example, having to fill out weekly plans after having delivered the PCA and the PUD; tutors must compile these plans for each of the subjects and generate another document which is sent to the Academic Coordinator. As a teacher tutor I have witnessed the planning that they send me, I do not want to criticize the work of my colleagues, because I know they suffer this same workload, but they come repeatedly week after week, so the work makes no sense at all, it is just protocol and unnecessary paperwork that undermines the quality of the classes. I know it is important to celebrate holidays and other dates, but it is too much time lost due to these activities, I have lost four Fridays in a row so far and that prevents me from fulfilling the planning I had at the beginning, I have to give content in less time and that overloads the student and me. Also, the excess of meetings, some necessary, but most of them could be solved by sending a communiqué; directions are given that sometimes are not even reviewed, documents are sent to be made that are not even collected, they are repetitive. Hours lost.

How is your relationship with your co-workers?

I consider myself a very sociable person, very empathetic, I care and I help whoever I have to help; I do not want to be an extremist and I know that when a person arrives

new to a place sometimes the adaptation process is hard, but so far the times I have asked for help I have not been given it; I am not referring to all colleagues, there are valuable people, but most of them work for themselves, they do not help, there is a certain selfishness and elitism. They are professionals who often do not respond to a greeting. It is very uncomfortable for me.

Is there cooperation between the teachers of the different areas when carrying out the teaching-learning process? Argument

When an interdisciplinary project is requested from the Ministry or from the authorities, we do meet by areas, by sub-levels, we agree, but because it is an obligation; afterwards we do not even touch the subject, in the end the work is individual. I consider that true integration and cooperation does not exist.

How is your relationship with your superiors?

There are good superiors, who care and do an excellent job; that is my opinion and I have let them know; people like the Academic Coordinator deserve my respect. I have mixed opinions about the rest. I have to accept that they are constantly sending information circulars to parents, teachers, students, and it seems that they are always there, but when you need help, when you require personalized treatment, they rarely respond. In other words, the concern is, again, protocol, apparent.

How does bureaucracy and institutional hierarchy affect your teaching?

There is an elitism, even teachers who do not occupy high positions, but who have been working there for a long time, think they are the big thing. Supposedly everything is very organized, very schematized, everything under control, but when there is a situation like a student having problems entering class or with the platform, they ask the vice-rectorate, the vice-rectorate sends it to the DECE, the DECE sends it to the Academic Coordinator, the Coordinator sends it to the tutor and in the end, nothing is solved. I have not solved any of the problems I have had following the hierarchy. Another problem is the platform, it is a unique platform of the school, but there are problems with it, students complain, I have had problems too and when I ask for help to the technician who attends it, the help never arrives, he does not answer the messages or he answers and does not solve anything.

How is your relationship with students and parents?

With the students is another story, I consider the relations to be good. With the parents also so far. My concern in this aspect is the academic level of the students, it is very low and they are used to always pass and the parents are used to be approved; and as the school is very interested in public opinion, they are used to not speak clearly, to consent and to give away. Within the educational community, the teacher is the last card in the deck, a puppet.

What psychological, emotional and physiological symptoms have you noticed since suffering this professional burnout?

I feel quite exhausted. I am not the professional I have always been. I love my job, I like to educate, however, I have made an impressive rejection to the institution. I don't feel good, I go there out of economic necessity; when I am there I do my job well, because I respect myself as a professional, but I am not comfortable. I isolate myself from others, which is not normal for me, as I said I am a very sociable person, extroverted even, but the environment is so dense and uncomfortable that I prefer to be alone. Insomnia, worry, I feel emotionally worn out. It's not me, it's not really me. After reviewing the theory consulted and analyzing the results of the interview, some points appear that encourage debate. Next, three fundamental aspects to discuss are proposed, which will be approached from the author's perspective; then recommendations will be offered to eradicate or cushion the cases of teacher burnout.

A person is constructed from his or her past experiences. The expectations of a human being come from the preconceived ideas he/she has about a given scenario. The interviewee carries with her a series of judgments, principles, values, and ideas about what education is, which make her seek in her new workplace what she already knew or what she wants to know. A person who presents herself in this way before a new reality should not be labeled an idealist, because, to a greater or lesser extent, we all do it; we are all containers of ideas that, only on certain occasions, coincide with reality.

The institution, evidently, has failures, especially in terms of priorities, and it is a serious situation which it tries to make up for through an "efficient" administration and an image that makes parents trust the service provided. The problem that derives from all this is that it twists the true mission of an educational institution, which is, above all, to educate. If the condition of particular support brings it closer to a company that offers a service than to an academy, then idleness and burnout are justified.

The term bureaucracy refers to the supremacy of a system where hierarchical relationships and chains of command appear as the center of organization and efficiency, leaving aside the simplicity and warmth of personalized relationships. An educational institution, like any institution, requires the cooperation of the different parts so that the whole can function, so the rector depends on his teachers, and the teachers depend on the technician and this, in turn, depends on the janitor, and so on, in order to provide the service required by the students and parents, who, of course, depend on the rector. If the links in this chain are not aware that they are links, and that they only function if they form chains, then the purpose of the educational institution is not fulfilled and it ceases to be relevant and pertinent to society.

One of the causes of the interviewee's condition is elitism and the difficulty of solving problems through the chain of command, demonstrating how the malfunctioning of the system can tear the parts apart and prevent them from fulfilling their functions correctly, thus affecting the system. It is a dialectical relationship between the individual and the institution, which can be studied in the light of any sociological model, and it is up to the authorities to achieve a balance. If the institution allows bureaucracy and hierarchy to

cloud the judgment of the links and cause discomfort to the parties, then the interviewee's burnout and burnout are justified.

The question we should ask ourselves at this point is: what is the heart of the educational process, the students, the teacher, the authorities, the Ministry of Education? Opinions may vary, but in my opinion, and I agree with the interviewee on this point, the heart is the teaching-learning process. This process, so often mentioned in the pedagogical field, consists of two sub-processes which have a main agent: the teaching process, with the teacher as the protagonist; and the learning process, with the student as the most important agent; one, because it is necessary for him to teach and the other, because it is inherent to him to learn. Everything that surrounds this process is part of a set of activities, actors and conditions called the educational process, which encompasses it, forming part of one of its dimensions, the Pedagogical, together with the Administrative, the community dimension, among others. Nowadays an educational institution cannot be conceived without all the dimensions and it is understandable due to the level of development of today's societies, but, it should not be forgotten that the first academies were meetings of people in some city or on the outskirts of town, and the first schools did not even have their own infrastructure, so the answer to the question in question follows: the heart of the educational process is the teacher-student relationship, the teaching-learning process.

Bureaucratic issues, the dense hierarchy, the prioritization of image over substance, the over concern for public opinion and the excess of extracurricular activities that divert efforts from the main objective, generate an anti-functional climate, to which it is difficult or impossible for good teachers to adapt; therefore, fatigue and burnout are justified.

CONCLUSIONS

It is concluded that the best way to eradicate teacher burnout is to prevent it, so educational institutions should include burnout in their strategic planning as a problem to be combated from different dimensions.

In conclusion, bureaucracy is one of the factors that limit the speed and effectiveness of the educational process; it also prevents the human factor, as a necessary element in interpersonal relationships, from mediating and, therefore, generates stress and, in the worst case, occupational burnout.

It can be inferred that training for teachers and administrative personnel in the management of emotions is necessary in educational institutions. These should include the presence of a psychologist specialized in the subject. In conclusion, the fight against burnout should come from the strategic planning of the institutions, establishing the values and priorities of the institution, in order to align the teaching staff in the same ideological path to achieve noble goals such as education.

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