REHABILITATION EDUCATORS' BURNOUT SYNDROME AND SELF-ESTIMATION OF THEIR PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE

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Abstract: The professional burnout syndrome, which is a real threat in the job of rehabilitation educators, lowers the quality of their psychophysical functioning and, as a result, significantly impacts the quality of their work, reducing the effectiveness of the rehabilitation process. The purpose of the research presented in the article was to determine the structure and the intensity of the special educators' burnout syndrome, and to establish the relationship between burnout and self-estimation of professional competence of teachers. The studies covered a group of 51 educators working with juvenile delinquents in three correctional institutions (borstals) in Poland. The main research tool was the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI). A survey showed a slightly elevated level of burnout in the test group and a relationship between the respective components of the professional burnout syndrome and self-estimation of professional competencies of rehabilitation educators: a statistically significant negative correlation between depersonalisation and subjectively assessed level of practical and moral competencies of the examined charges, and a positive correlation between a sense of personal accomplishment and the level of technical as well as practical and moral competence. The results obtained suggest that the development of professional competence should constitute the basis of mental hygiene and burnout prevention in the profession of rehabilitation educator.

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Introduction

The work of rehabilitation educators falls into the category of those professions where a close and demanding relationship with another person as well as emotional exchange processes form the basis for professional action. Also, an educator themselves is a key tool in educational and therapeutic work and codetermines its effectiveness. Therefore, the professional burnout syndrome, which is a real threat in the job of rehabilitation educators, lowers the quality of their psychophysical functioning and, as a result, significantly impacts the quality of their work, thereby reducing the effectiveness of the rehabilitation process.

Theoretical underpinnings

The working environment of rehabilitation educators abounds with adverse psychosocial factors having a negative impact on their emotional state. Various authors include here, among others, the following: certain personality traits of the client (charge), e.g. aggressiveness, operational characteristics of the institution, e.g. lack of social support or inability to participate in the decision-making process (Maslach, 1998; Maslach, Leiter, 2011; Pyżalski, 2002), conflicting requirements, and a conflict of roles (Fengler, 2001, pp. 100-103). Other aggravating factors are: too many charges per one counsellor, which causes a constant feeling of lagging behind with the tasks at hand; too many constant or continuously growing number of tasks to be performed at too early date awareness of the impossibility of changing a bothersome, repetitive situation; functioning in a constant sense of threat from charges, especially dangerous ones that are likely to behave in extreme ways (Machel, 2008, p. 246); a subjective sense of loneliness and lack of understanding at work, lack of appreciation and satisfaction; and a sense of low self-estimation of professional skills (Nawój, 2006, p. 345).

Consequently, the role and professional work of a rehabilitation educator is highly stressful (Kwiatkowski, 1993; Nawój, 2006; Machel, 2008; Pindel, 2008; Piotrowski, 2010), which increases the risk of appearance of the burnout syndrome in this professional group. According to the approach proposed by Maslach, the syndrome covers three areas of functioning of an individual: emotional, cognitive, and interpersonal. These areas have corresponding components of the professional burnout syndrome such as: emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment and personal involvement (Maslach, 1982; Tucholska, 2001). It is well established that stress is an integral part of correctional institutions, especially for juvenile, underage, and adult offenders (e.g. youth correctional centres, reformatories, and penitentiaries) (Ciosek, 2001; Goffman, 2011). However, not every work-related stress is a source of professional burnout. A key factor in the development of burnout is a generalized sense of failure in dealing with stress and an emotional strain of the performed work (Nawój, 2006, p. 343; Sęk, 2007, p. 87). Consequently, burnout is not so much

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a direct result of stress at work, but rather stress unmodified by own remedial activity (Sęk, 1994) associated with a sense of causality and self-efficacy.

Sęk (2007) proposes a model for understanding the mechanisms of professional burnout in the context of social cognitive psychology, emphasising the importance of cognitive appraisal, that comes into play as a result of experienced stress, perceived as a key factor both in the stress dynamics and the burnout. Primary appraisal is the assessment of daily workload and stressful events at work, whereas secondary appraisal assesses personal skills, in particular social and professional competencies that provide the basis for development of a sense of own remedial competence. In the opinion of the author (Sęk, 2007, p. 85), a sense of remedial competence is a concept similar to the notion of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977). According to Bandura (1982), perceived self-efficacy is a person's belief that they are capable of controlling events concerning their life and can effectively influence life events. A generalised sense of low remedial efficacy that limits the activity of an individual can thus be also understood as a special kind of perceived loss of control over the contradictions in the system of own expectations versus requirements of the environment (personal standards and professional ideals versus actual working conditions and requirements of the professional environment). To sum up, as a result of experienced failures and loss of control, and thus low self-efficacy, an individual does not initiate own remedial activity, which in turn increases the risk of development of the professional burnout syndrome.

In one of the latest models of professional burnout most frequently presented in the literature, Friedman (2003) characterised the relationship between stress and burnout by taking into account the variable of self-efficacy. According to the Friedman's model, the so-called self-efficacy plays an important role in the process by which stress leads to burnout (Friedman, Kass, 2002). Teaching self-efficacy is defined as the force of a teacher's belief that they are able to influence the educational outcomes of their charges, particularly those with learning difficulties or who are poorly motivated. Analysis of teaching self-efficacy in the discussed concept is based on the Classroom and School Context (CSS) model, which sees teaching efficacy as a composition of the following aspects (factors): a set of beliefs about organisational efficacy and a set of beliefs about classroom efficacy.

In accordance with the Friedman model, a teacher's sense of self-efficacy comes from several complementary sources: firstly, from an analysis of the educational and organisational tasks as well as the requirements connected with interpersonal relationships (the teacher knows what to do and how to do it). Secondly, from the teacher's assessment of their ability to carry through those tasks and establish interpersonal relationships (the teacher knows that he/she has the required skills and can use them), i.e. from self-estimation of own professional competencies.

The relationship between professional competencies and a sense of self-efficacy is particularly emphasised by M. Dudzikowa (1994, p. 204), according to whom competence is an ability to do something that depends on the knowledge of the component skills, the proficiency, and the belief that one is capable of using such skills. M. Dudzikowa states that, two sets of beliefs are important here: normative beliefs, which determine the appropriate values and directive beliefs, which show a way of realising those values. Therefore, professional competencies are a cognitive structure consisting of specific abilities (skills, activities) powered by knowledge and experience. It is built on a set of beliefs that the above abilities, in the context and situation of a particular individual, make it worthwhile and possible to effectively initiate and carry out tasks in order to achieve the desired professional goals.

The professional competencies of a teacher, as defined above, have been divided by Kwaśnica (1994) into: (1) practical and moral competencies, including: interpretation, moral, and communication competencies, and (2) technical competencies, including: postulated, methodical, and realised competencies.

In the group of practical and moral competencies, interpretation competencies demonstrate the ability to show a sympathetic attitude towards the world (objects, other people, and the self by means of self-reflection) and ask questions about the world. Moral competency is the ability to carry out moral reflections and question the legitimacy of a particular action. It is self-reflection on the counsellor's role and behaviour to stay true to oneself, avoid spiritual enslavement, and abstain from actions which may restrict the rights of other people with respect to their inner freedom, subjectivity, and choice of own path. The last subgroup of communication competencies concerns the ability to communicate

with the others and oneself Those competencies include, among others: the ability to empathetically understand and unconditionally accept the charge; the ability to offer constructive criticism in search for hidden causes of own and other people's views, beliefs, and behaviours; and a non-directive attitude, which demands presentation of own point of view as a mental offer, a possible and provisional answer, and not a ready and finished answer as the sole possibility.

In the group of technical competencies, postulated competencies are the skills of declaring support for specific goals perceived instrumentally. Methodological competencies concern the ability to act according to the rules determining the optimum order of operations. Methodological influence demands from educators specific skills, including: planning of educational and therapeutic interventions, creation of original educational concepts and programmes of educational and therapeutic work; and selection of appropriate methods and techniques of working. The last subgroup of realisation competencies concern the ability to choose assets and create favourable conditions for achieving these goals.

Self-estimation of professional competence, as understood above, affects the sense of self-efficacy of the educators and their readiness to undertake preventive measures intended to cope with stress at work. Thus, when it is positive, it reduces the risk of occurrence of the burnout syndrome.

Considering above, it should be assumed that a key factor directly or indirectly affecting professional burnout is the set of beliefs concerning self-estimation of own professional competence.

Major methodological assumptions of original research

Taking into account the above assumptions (which at the same time constitute a hypothesis for the second problem), the following research questions were formulated:

1. What is the level and structure of professional burnout of rehabilitation educators?
2. Whether and what relationships exist between the respective components of the professional burnout syndrome and the self-estimation of the level of professional competencies (technical as well as practical and moral) of the examined educators?

The empirical material was collected by means of a diagnostic survey using a questionnaire and was subjected to quantitative and qualitative analysis. The research tool was the Original Survey Questionnaire for Juvenile Aggressor Counsellors and an extended, 25-question version of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI).

The MBI questionnaire (Maslach, 1982) consisted of 25 questions to which the respondents gave one of four possible answers: 'very often', 'sometimes', 'seldom', 'never'. The responses were then coded as 4, 3, 2, or 1. The applied research tool contains four subscales – characterising four burnout components, where the first two subscales are 'negative', which means that high results with respect to emotional exhaustion (EE) and depersonalisation (DP) indicate the presence of professional burnout symptoms while the other two subscales – personal accomplishment (PA) and personal involvement (PI) – are 'positive', showing a lack of burnout symptoms at high values.

The research involved a group of 51 educators working with juvenile delinquents in three correctional institutions (borstals) in Poland, which were selected by means of the purposive random method. Our research sample included 11 women (21.5%) and 40 men (78.5%), holding a university degree (98%), aged: under 41 – 26 people (51%) and over 42 years old – 22 people (43%) with 3 people not stating their age.

Results and discussion

The level of values obtained by the surveyed educators in the respective subscales was determined by calculating the median and assuming that the results below the median showed a low level of a particular burnout coefficient, while those above the median showed an elevated level of the analysed characteristic (cf. Sekułowicz, 2002).

The average values of the respective components of the professional burnout syndrome obtained in the studies are as follows: the average for the emotional exhaustion coefficient (EE) is $M = 17.431$, for the depersonalisation factor (DP) – $M = 8.470$, the average value of a sense of personal accomplishment is $M = 28.372$ and of personal involvement – $M = 7.588$.

Analysis of the average values of the burnout coefficients shows that although, generally speaking, all the values oscillate near the median value of observation, the average arithmetic exhaustion (EE) and

depersonalisation (DP) are located above the median, while average values of personal involvement (PI) and accomplishment (PA) are located below the second quartile, which may suggest – providing bad occupational conditions – development of a full-blown professional burnout syndrome in the examined rehabilitation educators (Maslach, 1982).

Table 1. The level and inner structure of rehabilitation educators' professional burnout syndrome and its' correlations with self-estimation of their professional competencies – descriptive statistics and Pearson's correlation						
Burnout syndrome	Descriptive statistics		Practical and moral competencies		Technical competencies	
	<i>M</i>	<i>Me</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
Emotional exhaustion (EE)	17.431	17	-0.169	0.236	-0.260	0.065
Depersonalisation (DP)	8.470	8	-0.383	0.005	-0.247	0.080
A sense of personal accomplishment (PA)	28.372	29	0.311	0.026	0.559	0.000
Personal involvement (PI)	7.588	8	0.082	0.569	0.190	0.183

Source: Author

A major role in better understanding, and thus more effective prevention of professional burnout syndrome, is played by self-estimation of professional competencies by educators. Self-estimation of competencies seems to be an important variable in the process of emergence of the professional burnout syndrome as an indicator of a sense of self-efficacy (cf. Friedman, 2003). The relationship between burnout and competencies is also emphasized by Maslach, according to whom a lower sense of personal accomplishment is accompanied by a decreased sense of own competencies at work (Maslach, 2007, p. 15).

The above compilation shows that 'negative' subscales of burnout, i.e. emotional exhaustion (EE) and depersonalisation (DP) form mostly statistically insignificant negative associations with the subjectively assessed professional competencies of the surveyed educators. One exception is the statistically significant negative correlation at a level of $p < 0.05$ between depersonalisation and the level of practical and moral competencies, for which the value of the correlation coefficient is $r = -0.383$.

Regarding 'positive' subscales, generally speaking they form relationships with professional competencies; in the case of a sense of personal accomplishment (PA) those are statistically important relations, where the correlation coefficient with self-estimation of the level of practical and moral competencies is $r = 0.311$ (at $p < 0.05$), and with self-estimation of the level of technical competencies – $r = 0.559$ (at $p < 0.001$). However, in the case of personal involvement (PI) the identified correlations are not statistically significant.

The obtained results partially confirm the general working hypothesis because only two components of the professional burnout syndrome: depersonalisation (DP) and sense of personal accomplishment (PA) show a statistically significant correlation with self-estimation of professional competence. At the same time, the specific assumption concerning a positive connection between personal accomplishment (PA) and the level of professional competence, formulated by Maslach (2007), was fully confirmed.

The relationship between depersonalisation and the level of practical and moral competence revealed in the studies shows that the higher the subjectively assessed level of practical and moral competence, the lower the level of the depersonalisation coefficient and vice versa – the high level of depersonalisation is associated with a lower level of those competencies.

The obtained result suggests that practical and moral competencies reduce the risk of appearance, and may protect against its development, of the above component of professional burnout, which is particularly harmful to interpersonal relations (Burisch, 1994). This preventive role of practical and moral competencies in the development of the professional burnout syndrome results from its very nature. Generally speaking, the characteristics of practical and moral competencies emphasise its humanistic roots and expose the importance of subjectivity, empathy, dialogue, and respect manifested in the understanding and reflective attitude towards the charge, education, and the self. The above

practical and moral competencies of an educator rule out indifferent, callous, manipulative, non-empathetic, and dehumanising treatment of charges, making depersonalisation impossible.

The elevated depersonalisation (DP) score, developing against the background of a relatively low level of professional competence, over time led to the emergence in the examined educators of another professional burnout syndrome, i.e. a lowering of the sense of personal accomplishment (PA).

According to the results of this study a low sense of personal accomplishment (PA) is also accompanied by low (self-)estimation of professional competence. This positive correlation can be understood as follows. On the one hand, low self-estimation of professional competence, connected with lack of belief of the educator that they are able to (has the skills and can use them) carry out tasks and establish professional interactions, may make them refrain from professional activity; such passive attitude protects the educator against an unexpected defeat, but also prevents him from achieving a possible success, which could increase their sense of self-accomplishment and self-esteem. On the other hand, a low sense of self-accomplishment, setting in as a result of lack of personal activity and the consequent lack of tangible results, strengthens in the educator a sense of low self-esteem and low competencies.

Professional activity, whose significance in building a sense of personal accomplishment of an educator has been emphasised in the above interpretation, additionally explains the stronger relationship of that variable with the self-estimation of technical competencies than practical and moral competence. Technical competencies are used and revealed in practical activity of the educators, aimed at realisation of rehabilitation goals and tasks (Karłyk-Ćwik, 2009). For this reason they constitute the focal point of methodological actions, whose introduction and effective execution helps to build a sense of personal accomplishment.

Regardless of the method of interpretation of that two-way relationship, there is no doubt that self-estimation of professional competencies of educators is connected not only with depersonalisation (DP), but also with a sense of personal accomplishment (PA) and as such constitutes an important factor in the process of gradual professional burnout of those persons.

To sum up this part of the discussion, it must be stressed that technical as well as practical and moral competencies of rehabilitation educators should be constantly developed (enhanced) to prevent their professional burnout.

Conclusions

Considering the above diagnosis, preventive and therapeutic actions seem necessary to limit the risk of occurrence, but also the negative personal consequences (costs) among educators not affected by problem of burnout.

In addition to the recommendations concerning emotional support, education in techniques of coping with stress, and supervision or help from psychologists employed for that purpose at rehabilitation facilities, there are also recommendations concerning changes in the functioning of the institution itself, e.g. introduction of a new method of selecting the rehabilitation personnel and a better system for motivating and rewarding the personnel (Nawój, 2006; Pindel, 2008). There are also opinions recommending to educators a change in the mindset, e.g. by realising that everyone has the right to make mistakes, nobody can do everything, and no system is perfect. Educators are also advised not to take their problems too seriously and listen to themselves and their own emotions (Maslach, 1996; Mikrut, 2003; Szmagański, 2004). Finally, educators are encouraged to invest in themselves and their development, e.g. by fostering interests and activities outside their profession. Other recommendations in this search for effective ways of preventing professional burnout include constant improvement of qualifications, development of professional skills, and a multi-dimensional and reliable professional preparation of educators (Pindel, 2008; Sekułowicz, 2005; Sęk, 2007).

According to Sekułowicz (2005, p. 215), professional training of special educators is still dominated by behavioural approach and narrow professionalism (Gołębniak, 1998), while the humanistic model of a teacher as a reflective practitioner (Schon, 1983) constitutes only a theoretical construct, which so far has not been transferred to the teaching practice. An alternative, which gives hope of changing the current situation is the reflective concept of teacher education, where a candidate for the profession should be the *de facto* author of the scenario of personal professional preparation. Also, the main factor in that process should be new, broadly defined professional competencies, including technical

but especially practical and moral competencies that should be developed in rehabilitation educators. However, it should not be understood as an illusion of competencies which results from defensive deformation of information about self and the working conditions. Instead, it concerns a set of beliefs resulting from specific and systematic experiences of personal success in designing and execution of effective actions, and the ability to cope with new and unconventional situations that require educational reflex (Kwiatkowski, 1993, pp. 153-154). Development of thus understood competencies should constitute the basis of mental hygiene and burnout prevention in the profession of rehabilitation educator.

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