DOCTORAL (PhD) THESIS

THE MAPPING OF TEACHER BURNOUT AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS IN COVASNA COUNTY

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Justification of topic choice

During my search for the theme of my paper I was thinking about a theme, which in its actuality stimulates the finding of solutions, but because of its negative consequences, prevention hasn’t been stressed correspondingly. Although the concept of burnout syndrome has been known since the mid-70-ies, in the Hungarian-speaking areas people started to talk about it only about it only in recent years, and in Romania, in the field of teaching in Hungarian there hasn’t been initiated any case-study regarding the burn-out-involvement.

I consider the importance and the usefulness of the research in the fact that the quality of teaching in Hungarian also depends on the mental health of the Hungarian teaching minority, what support they can get to perform a quality work. The professional and psychological state of human resources can influence the rising generation, therefore those researches are important which contribute to the better understanding of this field, of the school, the education, the world. The results of the research can help the affected ones, interested persons, the decision makers in the respect that, they can bring arguments on basis of research and facts to the support given to teachers, within and outside of school, in the training, and on-going training.

I started to do research on burnout support systems, and regretfully found that in the region the educational managing staff and employees have no idea about any support system, which would serve this purpose, and there are no related steps that could lead to the prevention, information, trainings in this field. All these facts provided me the reasons and purpose to start and create such a research of this research, in the hope that by this progress is being made in this area.
Definition of burnout

The concept of “burnout” and its typical symptoms were formulated by the psychoanalyst Herbert J. Freudenberger (1974). The appearance of the symptom is a response to individual stress, however the context of organizational and social relationships must be taken into account (Maslach, C.-Jackson, S.E., 1981, 99-115.). Moreno, J. L. (1994, 97-111. o.) Studying the role the ego-progress it was also established that in course of our lives we must comply with many roles, and these also affect for our self-esteem. Thus, if we fail in certain roles, be it that of the teacher’s role, automatically the decrease of our self-esteem also appears. If the role of the teacher, as a value in itself falls apart, this may lead to becoming tired of the role or to even burnout. We can search the reason of it in many ways, whether it be an ill-structured / read teacher's role, an unfulfilled expectation of that role, demotivation, forcing points, etc. In this case, typically the subject already rejects the comments of his or her environment.

The concept was included in the psychological lexicon published in Munich in the year 1995, which shows the importance and the interest in it. Accordingly the burnout: "Is a state alike depression, which occurs due to chronic stress as a result of increased demands on ourselves and against excessive expectations, especially in the supporting professions; most often unconscious tendencies (Helfer syndrome), as well as the unrealistic expectations of himself or herself and of the institutions; it can be processed during the supervision" (Lexikon der Psychologie, 1995, 53.)

Beginning from the 90-ies, researches have been unfolded in several helping professions. The pastoral psychologist Hézser Gabor (1995), who attempts to formulate the burnout in the reflection of the results social psychology of the 80-ies, also putting the phenomenon into the relation of the interaction of the individual and the environment. In his view, the individual is at the same time the dangerous condition in himself and subject of cause of endangerment while trying to meet the expected social norms, this duality leads to the burnout. He was the first in the Hungarian vocational literature, who takes into account the negative meanings arising from the concept, the resulting judgments, protests, and as a replacement of the concept he suggests the term of “occupational deformation”, which according to his view might reduce the resistance mentioned above and may bring more positive reactions from the public. But he considers it ultimately as being a too complex
psychological process to be worked out in detail, and questions its the pure scientific research potential. Into this social-psychological strand can be listed Fekete Sandor, who agrees with the previous definitions, consequently emphasizes the feeling of incompetence, and in his opinion the resulting negative attitude has an impact on the work and social relationships too. (1991, 17-29. o.).

From among the teachers many have carried out research-work in the recent years. Knauder, H. (1996, 682-688. o.) found that the “out-burnt” teacher cannot interact with his students adequately, he does not show interest towards them. The result will be that the students at their turn overtake their teacher’s behavior, and they do not take into account the teacher. This is the way that leads to a bad teacher-student relationship. This vicious circle furthermore worsens the self-image of the teacher leading to a poor teacher-student relationship. The teacher is less and less willing to show an accepting, understanding behavior, and finally he doesn’t want to do any sacrifice for the students, he takes up a hard, withstanding position, living according to his own rules, clearly rejecting other ways of tackling the problem.

Petróczí Erzsebet, who is a clinical psychologist and has practical experience in health care, in education, in the social sphere, together with her colleagues (p 1999, 429-441.) made a survey with the involvement of five-hundred teachers and brought so very important results that were published, according to which 62% of the teachers are dissatisfied with their material life in general, and only 26% were dissatisfied with their own lives. All of these data are based on working conditions, but the presence of these working conditions, however - as I will demonstrate it later – show up as the causes of the burnout.

Ónody Sarolta (. 2001 81-85.o) psychiatrist, psychotherapist (her research areas being: mental health, psycho-therapy) in her definition in the metaphor of burnout takes as a basis the technical term of the analogy: the weakening of a previously well-functioning energy source weakening, and its potential power-burnout. In her view, this approach carries an appropriate carrier-low meaning for the getting out-tired out the human soul, and if the person is exposed to a high degree of chronic emotional stress, as a consequences of the constant emotional and mental stress he spiritually experiences a final emptiness. According to Ónody’s interpretation the out-burnt individual finds it much more difficult to grasp and tackle the everyday problems, be those aspects of work or private life, he approaches everything negatively. All these may be accompanied by symptoms such as:
phobias, anxiety, hypochondrical symptoms, or even depression. To these symptoms the body also responds by loss of appetite, physical weakness, insomnia, in the form of unexplained aches and pains. This is a process that takes place in several stages. This process-like characteristic can be read on the lexical meaning of the word too: the burnout is a process, and irreparable end state -. " (Ónody 2001 81-85.o.) The author believes that the use of the concept of burnout is also causing a problem inside the pedagogical circles, because in case of the teachers a high moral is necessary to be maintained it is impermissible getting tired of their work, as they should state as examples for the coming generations. The average-m mentality sees the value of the work in the inherent fatigue, and considers is implied that in the case of burnout symptoms this state does not allow the pursuit of responsible work. In today's dominant power and self-sacrifice-oriented world, no one dares or does not afford to fail. This explains the syndrome - as existing concept - the denial and rejection, therefore this can mean the difficulty in its research and treatment as well as the willingness of the subjects for prevention. (ibid)

As for me, I gathered the findings from different authors in their studies published between 1974 and 2001 on this concept – and presently use this term in the following sense: “the result of such an undesired commitment to a goal, lifestyle or relationship that results in a triad-syndrome (logged on emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced professional-fulfillment) that leads to the role-failure, which leads to chronic emotional debits as a result of physical, emotional, mental weakening, discharge, fatigue."

**Causes of burnout**

Studying the causes of burnout, for a multi-faceted approach, with the use of the relevant literature, I grouped the causes as follows: fatigue, role-conflict, organizational and interpersonal relationship conflicts, the imbalance of the self well-being, stress, the helper-syndrome and expectations.
Symptoms of burnout

The syndrome symptoms may occur on: physical - emotional, mental health and behavior levels. The syndromatic - process was described by Herbert Freudenberger and Gail North (1985) as a twelve-step way:

1. From the will to the constraint of self-proof.
2. Intensified work
3. Neglecting the personal needs
4. Suppression of personal needs and conflicts.
5. Change of values (friends or hobbies are completely dismissed)
6. Denial of emerging problems (cynical behavior and aggression become apparent)
7. Withdrawal (reducing social contacts to a minimum, becoming walled off, alcohol or other substance abuse may occur).
8. Behavioral changes become obvious to others.
9. Depersonalization (life becomes a series of mechanical functions)
10. Inner emptiness
11. Depression
12. Complete burnout.

The setting of targets

At the beginning and during my research, I had kept the following objectives in mind:

➢ to draw attention to the fact that there isn’t a draft law on support systems in Romania, that could assist or support the teachers' burnout syndrome, preferably free of charge - as a complex of occupational risk factors - its prevention, management, solution.

➢ I already have received promises from the board of management for the support of organizing training courses, which would concentrate only to the prevention and treatment of this syndrome, after the completion of my researches.
My research methods and the population studied

In the structure of the research I based my work on the legislation in force and the context. For an empirical reliability of the data collection I used a multi-faceted approach:

- 1. An interview based on 7 basic interview questions, with: the Covasna County School Inspectorate, the professional inspector responsible for special education, the headmaster of the Psycho-Pedagogical Centre of the countz Covasna, and the director of the Covasna County Teachers’ House.
- 1. the Richelson-Freudenberger (1980) / Burnout questionnaire translated by myself, applied on 107 educators.
- 2. background questionnaire containing 41 questions- with 132 educators
- 3. deep interview based on nine basic questions- with 8 educators

Conclusions in the light of the hypothesis:

- 1. My first hypothesis, according to which in the Romanian educational and legal systems for teachers’ education there is a conception for the prevention and education of this concept on a declarative level, but on the later educational the subsequent educational practice as training is not an option, has been demonstrated. The law provides an annual medical - and psychological work examination, where in principle, the professional or psychological harm could be detected.. During the course of the research or before it there hasn’t been any ongoing training for teachers in the county.

- 2. My second hypothesis, that refer to the fact that in case of the burnout-persons the states that lead to it are formulated, only partly came true. These conditions are only partially conscious to the subject only partially realized, sometimes they mix that is what is in absence may also count as a difficulty. With regard to the factors affecting I found an explanation for the burnout only 10.2%. Thus for the 90% of the phenomenon I can not give an account for the factors examined in the context of this research.
➢ 3. The third hypothesis that the material state affects the motivation of burnout, has not been confirmed. There is same risk for those who have scarce material resources as those who have plenty. The persons who have a higher income source are more exposed to the risk of fatigue, but those who have only one income resource may also their work burdensome.

➢ 4. The statement according to which the lack of information impede the prevention and implementation with the appropriate professional support, is considered by me to be true. Out of the subjects interviewed only 6.1% think that he or she may receive enough information. 19.8% of them would not go on a training, so 80.2% think that they do not have information enough regarding the syndrome, and would make it up for the shortcomings - under certain conditions – on further trainings.

➢ 5. My assumption is that the inadequate “time for a rest” - system is related to the burning-out is only partially confirmed, because those who spend their breaks with paperwork or even mandatory surveillance breaks between lessons too, can have less time for a proper rest than those who at the time of the break can do things of other nature. However, a wider range of proof is necessary in my opinion, therefore further research.

➢ 6. The denial as a major characteristic of the symptom, that makes it difficult for those in the intervention to be assisted – proved to be true, the request for help as well as the data on the environmental concern prove it. First of all 52% of those persons who would not go for a further training, are affected by a burn-out phase. Secondly, among those who do not consider it important to be involved with the syndrome of professional burnout there are persons in all the phases of burnout. Thirdly, the syndrome is assumed by only 73% of them in front of their families, 56% in front of their superiors and 46% in front of their colleagues. The others would deny it, or even do not know whether they could undertake it or not. Out of the research subjects only 38% would turn to a professional person. All these data demonstrate a significant denial, which make it clearly difficult for intervention and assistance.

➢ 7. Based on the results I got my statement that the career is not linked to the future of professional burnout, was confirmed. In light of the data, those who enjoy what they do are also at risk.
➢ 8. In connection with the in-depth interviews’ assumption that we can not talk about professional burnout, without taking in view the private life, also proved to be true, but for such kind of research statements I think that a larger amount of research model would be relevant.

➢ 9. It was established that due to the burnout endangerment and extent the idea of a career change is present today among the teachers, but it is not only the presence and extent of the syndrome that affects it, there are also other by myself not yet unspecified reasons that may also play a role in this, therefore in this case also one could draw appropriate conclusions after further research.

➢ 10. Among the teachers who were part of the research and attended interviews they really have the need for this professional aspect and for the prevention, but that part of the hypothesis has not been confirmed according to which there would be a link between the need for the prevention and the age. Also it was not confirmed that there would be a link between the need of prevention and the stage of burnout. The latter is a partial explanation for the difficulties of proof and I see it in the typical denial syndrome manifestations.

Conclusions

Over the many structured definitions, looking for the reasons, two large categories were created in my mind while researching the syndrome: the deficits and the burdens. In our educational system-oriented approach, I have found a critical teacher shortage, such as the assessment of skills. To track it further, the difficulty also lies in the lack of recognition of the teachers, there being scarce possibility for exchange of expertise, for some reasons there is a lack of mutual reinforcement, not much social, professional support and motivating presence from part of the leading staff, as well as limited advancement and career development opportunities. The facilities of the institutions cannot provide the full material base which is socially accelerated in IT and information flow, as the teachers are at their turn unable to keep pace with time. All of these also bring about administrative deficiencies. One of the most powerful motivating tool is still the money and its lack, but in a society where there are the same pay grade categories for teachers regardless of their performance,
there is surely is the lack of the financial motivation. The series of deficiencies can preclude
the higher number of learning troubled diagnosed children, for whose teaching the there
hasn’t been done any special training recently to prepare them for the general subjects. In
case of high class sizes, the mental and physical use of the teachers is bigger, even if this is
associated with the requirement of have separate sessions for children with special needs,
this is also a tiring task for a long period. The administrative requirements also multiplied
over the past few years. The mental fatigue, the incumbent for teacher expectations, and
the resulting stress fibers listed as factors leading to burnout.

Based on the interviews, I concluded that the presence of varying degrees of
involvement of the syndrome varies from individual to individual, and it depends on each
one’s resistance whether he or she is affected in the burnout or not.

**Conclusions and usefulness of the results, further research:**

The topic is supported by the results of the research. Already during my interviews with
the leadership I succeeded to draw attention to the existence and actuality of the syndrome
The results were significant not only for me but also on the course of the interviews and
questionnaires, but there was a feedback for the persons filling them in. I believe that the
starting level of thinking will help in favoring the start of the work and the prevention.
Together with the leading team, we are in principle, planning prevention activities and an
idea has been thought about the reflection on the need to find a more effective solution to
support the operation of the system of burnout affected persons.

I would extend this work over all the teachers in the district Covasna. We would get
more comprehensive results and when the results of an entire district could be surveyed and
conclude the importance of the syndrome and perhaps the authorities would deal with the
assistance and prevention.

For the future, I plan to develop a prevention program, which I have already received the
promise of Covasna County Teachers’ House for implementation.
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- Membru la „Comisia interna de evaluate continua”, 2014-2015
- Membru al „Comisiei de monitorizare a absentelor si a riscurilor de abandon scolar”, 2014-2015
- Önkéntes segítségnyújtás a CJRAE keretén belül kiégett pedagógusok számára

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