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Logo therapy and Existential Analysis in Counselling Psychology as Prevention and Treatment of Burnout Syndrome

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Abstract

The contribution is aimed on burnout syndrome from the point of view of existential analysis and logotherapy. Logotherapy and existential analysis is quite a new psychological approach, conceived by Viktor Frankl, which could not develop in our country until 1989. A person suffering from chronic fatigue, irritation and loss of meaning - thus the burnout syndrome - is influenced by experience „I must“. This person loses his or her relationships, and experiences emptiness and hopelessness. Such individual is endangered as the meaning is related to values we live and we decide for. Such individual lacks inner feeling of accomplishment, does not perform values he or she believes in. Logotherapy, in this respect, can offer ways how to work with such person. This psychological approach teaches how to leave a „role“ and how to create relationships within and later without.

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1. Introduction

Despite various definitions, we can state that burnout syndrome is wherever a human is in a contact with other people, is dependent on their appreciation, and can be exposed to chronic stress. Kallwass claims (Zvanovcova, 2008, p. 6), that burnout syndrome affects even very self-disciplined workers.

According to Karazman the burnout syndrome is characterized by a long-lasting overload and by laying too heavy requests, which consequently leads to emotional exhaustion, materialization of relationships, loss of confidence.

Burnout syndrome, under Freudenberger conception (Zvanovcova, 2008, p. 7), can be divided into 10 phases:

A/The compulsion to prove themselves, idealization

The affected ones start their job with great involvement, putting heavy demands on themselves

B/ Intensive involvement, so-called workaholic phase

In this phase they take further new tasks, extra work, start work overtime, undertake responsibilities. Meaningfulness and ideal are important stimuli. However, from the point of existential analysis it can be the insufficient enjoyment over “Can I be what I am” that is the incentive. Such a person searches for self-esteem, appreciation and self-confirmation in work, not believing in it, though. In my opinion, it is important to pay attention to the notion “self-appreciation”.

Self-appreciation in existential analysis is the core of the existence. Self-appreciation is characterized by being. E.g. I am happy to be with you just for the fact itself, not for a task or a function. Experience of being fulfils the person completely, the person just wants to take part in. During the burnout syndrome it is the experience of having that prevails. There must be some intention, plan, function. As long as a person experiences his own values that are balanced, oriented on relationships, then this value shifts him towards living. As long as it is not balanced, people start to demand, to work and it is easy to misinterpret the objectives. Of course, both poles have their extremes that we are able to imagine. The extreme orientation on objectives, on working leads to frustration, emptiness. The experience leading to burnout syndrome is the lack of self-appreciation. Such people do not appreciate themselves unless they are efficient. They do not take time to relax which inevitably brings consequences.

C/ Neglecting their needs

People experience the lack of time, do not pay attention to their needs. There can be a significant increase in the need of coffee, food, nicotine. There occur sleeping disorders. A person becomes very sensitive to criticism from the society regarding his way of life.

D/ Suppressing of their conflict and needs

People begin to suppress their way of life. They neglect their interests, needs, they become too exhausted for their hobbies, entertainment. The sleeping disorders become more significant, there occur feelings of weakness. Typical symptom for this and the previous phases is a strong effort to perform at the same pace as before. The food represents comfort, relax, escape.

E/ Revision of values

The values are revised, they gain a different meaning. Values that are not linked with the job become burden, “we live to work”.

F/ Denial of arising problems

Stressful situations further affect relations, family life. Helping professionals are not only affected in their family background, but also in their working environment. They become more irritated, aggressive, impatient. They tend to conceal anxiety, fear, unease, restlessness, fatigue.

In this phase they “hand in their resignation”. At this phase the individual is in need of professional help.

G/ Withdrawal from the world, from the life

The affected people lose their inner consent with what they do, live. They lose their relationship to work, to themselves, to their desires and expectations. They try to work effectively, but they perform their work just mechanically, postponing it all the time. They experience inner emptiness, meaninglessness. They are searching for something to replace the work and the linked excitement. In this phase they are not able to accomplish the change in their life, as they need to adopt an attitude, which is out of their limits at that moment. Their experience is driven by imperative “I must!”.

H/ Obvious behavioral, attitudinal changes, dehumanization

In this phase there is obvious deterioration in their social life, they avoid society, social contacts, they isolate themselves. In helping professions they cannot help their clients as they are not able to see the client’s needs due their own self-pity. They underestimate the others, they do not see the other people’s value. They become cynical.

CH/ Depersonalization (loss of inner feelings), inner emptiness.

They become depersonalized, their self-esteem is deteriorated. They perform all work and duties just automatically. Psycho-somatic disorders grow substantially. They are not grounded, they become isolated, feeling antipathy to themselves and others as well.

I/ Depression, exhaustion, total burnout

Depression, severe physical exhaustion. There is only desire for peace and quiet, for sleep. They experience hopelessness and they are in danger of suicide. The individual is endangered on all levels - physical, psychical, immunity - all of them with danger of failure.

Case history.

Mr. J.R. , 38 years old, business manager, carefully dressed up. He comes to the counseling office with aversion towards anything. Tired of life, he feels exhausted, tired all the time. During the conversation I learn that he has been working 13 hours daily recently. As a manager and co-owner of the business he started the job with enthusiasm. Gradually he had to work overtime so that the business would flourish, though. Sometimes he even stayed at work overnight. He is married. Despite their favorable financial situation his wife is not willing to put up with his nearly total absence from family life and she insists on his seeking a professional help, otherwise she threatens with a divorce.

Mr. J. suffers from sleeping disorder, smokes heavily, and loses weight considerably. Suffers from other health problems, too, like stomach ache, headache and pain in his chest under the breastbone. During the conversation he announces that he has to work because otherwise the company would go bankrupt. He complains about not seeing any point in anything.

He stopped playing volleyball twice a week as he did two years ago.

In the family there occur frequent fits of anger, especially when his wife demands him to spend time with the family.

Mr. J. attends the counseling office as his wife wished him to, and he himself instinctively feels some discrepancy, but he cannot put a finger on it, and he asks me to do something about it....

2. Frankl's conception of burnout syndrome

From the existential analysis and logotherapy point of view, the burnout syndrome is a disorder caused by loss of meaning. The meaning of life is linked with values we live up to, for which we decide. Lives of many people prove that we are not helpless victims of destiny. A person can be subdued by destiny as long as he clutches one requirement that is not fulfilled, and that consequently makes one to lose appreciation.

Jaro Krivohlavy indicates (2009, p. 9) that the opposite of loss of meaning is a pursuit of wisdom. Wisdom means to live in a hopeful spirit.

Unless people live up to the values they believe and experience, they quickly reach the state of exhaustion.

Frankl, under his anthropology, mentions this exhaustion in the following fields:

1. **physical sphere** - physical weakness, reduced immunity, susceptibility to diseases, muscular and nape tensions, sleeping disorders, etc.
2. **mental sphere** - total emotional exhaustion, sadness, loss of optimism, loss of happiness, increase in irritability.
3. **noetic sphere** - disrespect to self-esteem and to the world itself. People cast doubts on value of the life, they lose spiritual orientation and Frankl uses notion "**existential vacuum**"

"Nowadays people increasingly experience feelings of inner emptiness, feeling of meaninglessness of the being itself" (Tavel 2007, p. 11) Frankl cites one of his young clients: *"I am 22, have a degree, I am living well off, and there is more sex and power at my service than I can cope. However, I must ask a question what the meaning of it all is."* (Tavel 2007, p. 11). Existential vacuum presents lack of meaning, purposelessness, boredom.

3. Existential analytical insight into the phases of burnout

Under the existential analysis (EA), the burnout syndrome presents exhaustion. How can such an exhaustion arise? Definitely, such a person can be characterized by inexistence of inner fulfillment. Inner fulfillment, under existential analysis, is a state when people accomplish values they believe, they experience, they adopt, unlike they do in general values.

Accomplishing the inner values results in living a meaningful and fulfilled life. In this sense, there is a grave difference between living the existential meaning or an apparent meaning. An apparent meaning can be represented e.g. by pursuing one's career, social acceptance etc. can lead to experience emptiness. Such a way of life is power-demanding and causes stress. At the best, pride of achievement substitutes the joy of creativity. However, pride does not either provide warmth, nor it provides livelihood.

Suppose a person experiences inner fulfillment, this feeling can support him even in the periods of fatigue and exhaustion, as self-esteem and experienced inner agreement play an important role. Under EA, the inner fulfillment is reached when the reaction to an event represent something positive. On condition that people deal with such an event, relationship, life in this way, they fulfill their lives with existential meaning (Zvanovcova, 2008, p. 11).

4. A. Längle theses

A. Längle is a direct pupil of the logotherapy founder. This part of contribution presents 4 theses which describe the way how existential analysis approaches burnout syndrome and its etiology (Zvanovcova, 2008, p. 12 - 20).

Thesis 1

Burnout syndrome is a long-term state of creativity without experiencing. Satisfaction with the job can be suggested as the best protection from the burnout syndrome. While working with enjoyment, inner consent, there is just a little probability of ending up in burnout syndrome. This experience has to be distinguished from the experience of idealization, enthusiasm, though.

Another important factor of burnout syndrome is whether the job is the only source of living or not. Whether the person is dependent entirely on it. This can provide an apparent meaning like prestige or profit, which can create the feeling of being trapped. The experience “**I must and there is no other way**” prevails. This experience is fundamental for burnout syndrome. People then do not live in conformity with their inner ego. They begin to be oriented on career, influence, income, appreciation, praise, social acceptance or duties rather than on the task itself. In this way human resources and tasks can be substituted as it is activity in question, not the value of the object.

Thesis 2

Burnout syndrome is caused by formal motivation (motivation which doesn't concern the task itself), and leads to mere formal interest in the job, task, individuals. Motivation is mostly subjective, not objective.

Initial necessity, which is the core of the attitude causing the mental disorder, is inevitable for development of burnout syndrome. There are cases when clients took over their attitudes from others, or derived their attitudes from the belief.

In EA the psychologists search for specific attitude to life which leads to such a behaviour. This behaviour can be either intentional or involuntary, but reflects the subjective aspects of a person and his comprehension of the most important things in life. It is then described as a non-existential attitude, when the job becomes a mere tool of the aim, which leads to deficient symptomatology in somatic, psychic and noetic levels. Job itself becomes a utility value, in other words a means to fulfill a certain aim. This powerful orientation on aim expresses the standards, in other words - what people consider inevitable for a full-bodied life.

In this way the life itself loses its values and thus the absence of the values, which cause the emotionality, causes grayness of the life. It can be described **as the aims being burned down and in their ashes the life gets cold.**

Thesis 3

The burnout syndrome underscores the life attitude oriented on the aim, and consequently loss of life sensation.

The impact of this fact is that people do not perceive existential reality, they do not respect their own value, and other people's value, which consequently causes materialization of the relationship (relationship values).

Sensations, bodily needs and sense of rightness are put aside and thus the people lose the relationship to themselves. The consequence of the emotional impersonalization can be described by statement "my heart is not involved". The whole situation leads to stress and to discordance of life. People experience inner emptiness, deficiency of fulfillment, mental necessity and loss of life sensation. This can be described as an "emotional death", when work does not refresh, it just substitutes the missing close relations and absent touch of being.

Thesis 4

There are two main factor of burnout syndrome. First - outer relation to the others, second - inner relation to themselves and their emotions. The deepest cause and source of burnout syndrome, from the EA point of view, is deficiency in existential personal motivation.

It is inevitable to list the motivations so that we could understand the burnout syndrome from the EA point of view.

1. Can I be?

Can I afford to be? Do I have enough personal space or am I in danger. Lack of safety makes people search for security in rigid arrangements, to protect and keep their life space...

2. Do I want to be?

The second basic personal motivation regards emotional quality of life, the attachment to the being as a value.

Disorders on this level, e.g. blocked emotionality, fear of relationships, lead to the basic emotions of obligation, blame and depression. Such people are apt to realize their potential in helping professions and they become prisoners of their indispensability.

3. Can I be what I am?

The third basic motivation deals whether people appreciate themselves, whether they perceive values, whether they experience the acceptance of being what they are. Disorders in this aspect shift orientation on qualities that increase their value - career, prestige, money. The effort leads to acceptance and respect from the society.

4. Do I want a meaning?

The fourth basic motivation regards meaning, provides life with life orientation. Deficiency on this level leads to apparent meaning.

5. Results.

Burnout syndrome therapy

1. Relieving

- boundaries of individual's responsibility are set.
- client is bound to perceive reality, to set realistic aims.

- pointing out dysfunctional links and patterns or wrong strategies can contribute the relieving
- it is essential to strengthen client's confidence in realistic limits (see the own values).

Schmidbauer claims (2008, p. 227) that non-realistic helping professionals are chronically disappointed, as their expectations are not fulfilled.

2. Broadening of the client's perspective, processing of the deficiency in basic personal motivation (BPM)

- appeal to values which the client wants to live, but "cannot"
- what does work provide you with and what does work substitutes to you? At this stage the client is helped to find ways to BPM - security, safety, relations, emotionality, need of appreciation, need of being seen.

Burnout syndrome therapy and prevention is carried out through the following questions:

"Why am I doing what I do?"

"Do I enjoy what I do?"

"Do I want this to be my life?"

"Do I want my past to be created out of these?"

"Do I want to live as I am living now?"

6. Conclusion

Substantial part in prevention and treatment of burnout syndrome is living people's own values - in relationships, in the family, but also in tiny little things. People should move within the limits of **"I want and I can act differently"**.

People should undergo self-reflection and answer the following questions: "Do I really have to?", "What is going to happen, if I do not do it?", "What consequences will there be?", "Do I really have to?"

Honest answers provide the clients with cognition that in fact they are not obliged to do it, that it is a substitute created by themselves for the above mentioned reasons. When people own too little of their values, they lose perception of their abilities, they lose the space to be what they are, they lose their basis for their personal being. Prevention and at the same time treatment of burnout syndrome is a way to the inner movement. First to the self, then to the world. Logotherapy and existential analysis help the client to find the way and mostly lead the client, besides perception and evaluation of the particular situation, towards the undergoing the measures necessary to fulfill the individual with more joy. Thus, existential analysis leads the client towards emotional volitive experience, towards responsible dealing with the life and leads towards the full personal existence.

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