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Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences 29 (2011) 98 – 106

Procedia
Social and Behavioral Sciences

International Conference on Education and Educational Psychology (ICEEPSY 2011)

Motivation to Work and the Syndrome of Professional Burn-out among Teachers in Latvia

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Abstract

This study highlights and analyses the connection between peculiarities of motivation to work and professional burn-out among urban and rural school teachers in Latvia, who have less than five years of professional experience. The motives of work satisfaction and social status occupy the lowest positions in work motivation structure. The study detects significant correlations between emotional exhaustion, economic motive and the motive of career growth in both groups of teachers. The possible effects of interconnection between work motives and professional burn-out are discussed in this article.

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Selection and/or peer-review under responsibility of Dr Zafer Bekirogullari.

Keywords: motivation; professional burn-out; rural school teacher; urban school teacher.

1. Introduction

The value of emotional and physical load differs in the process of professional activity. At low loads the body self-regulates, while at high loads it requires certain ways to restore health and work efficiency. It is established that specialists who experience intensive contact with other people as a part of their professional activity are primary subjects to the syndrome of professional burn-out. However, the syndrome develops slower among teachers (Maslach, 1993). The first stage of burn-out may form during the first 3-5 years of pedagogic practice and influences the characteristics of mental functions: memory interference and reduced motor activity (Vodopyanova & Starchenkova, 2009). The formation of second burn-out stage occurs between 5 and 15 years of practice. It is expressed in the loss of interest to work and communicate, also irritability and headaches. The third burn-out stage is formed between 10 and 20 years of practice. The major symptoms are emotional apathy, desire for solitude, constant lack of energy (Holt, Fine, & Tollefson, 1987).

There is also a number of studies reflecting the expression of teachers' burn-out syndrome. Each study has its own focus, for instance, Hakan Sari (2004) explores issues of burn-out and work satisfaction among special

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school teachers in Turkey. Welko Tomie and Elvira Tomic (2008) have discovered that lack of existential fulfilment is an important burn-out determinant among primary education teachers and primary school principals in the Netherlands. The findings of Haim Gaziel (1995) indicate that teachers in Israel, when experiencing professional burn-out, intend to leave their workplace or change profession. David Chan (2007) shows results of the study there burn-out is related to successful intelligence and self-efficacy among Chinese prospective and in-service school teachers in Hong Kong. Fernando Betoret (2006) has investigated relationships between teacher occupational stressors, self-efficacy, coping resources, and burn-out among Spanish secondary school teachers. Millicent Abel and Joanne Sewell (1999) in their study discuss the sources of stress and burn-out symptoms among rural and urban secondary school teachers in the USA.

There haven't been any fundamental studies to uncover the peculiarities of teachers' professional burn-out in post-Soviet Latvia. That is why we don't have an opportunity to compare our results. In addition, in the second half of the 20th century Soviet Union, Latvia included, experienced the growing interest of the fundamental study of motivation. The results of this study show that the motives of achievement, professionalism and social status dominate the hierarchy of professional motivation among the majority of teachers. It is also discovered that teachers consider their level of knowledge, which they have acquired during the training period, as sufficient. Cognitive motives do not occupy high position in this hierarchy, while the motives of economic well-being occupy the last positions (Ilyin, 2011).

Motivation is a dynamic process, which influences working atmosphere, communication, productivity, cohesion, emotional state, cooperation, the process and control of self-fulfilment etc. (Forands, 2007).

Any activity is poly-motivated, i.e. prompted by several different motives rather than by just one. There are always dominant ones among these – they lead the hierarchical structure of motivational sphere of individuals, and they determine directions and results of their activity. In pedagogical process these are social, scientific-cognitive and professional motives (Markova, 1993). In every single case the motivation is mixed. It depends on the variety of objective factors, although its basic hierarchical core has to be stable, because the level of motivational formedness is dependent on the development of personality's ideological positions, its beliefs and directions (Leontyev, 2005).

The system of motivation to work includes a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic motives. Intrinsic are motives of self-development and interest to learn new topics. The motives of improving qualification, communication and receiving praise are also natural and useful, although cannot be entirely attributed to the intrinsic motives. Extrinsic are motives of economic reward, desire to be significant, the motives of prestige and success (Heckhausen & Heckhausen, 2010).

Personal and professional growth and competitiveness of teachers are impossible without increasing the share of intrinsic motives in the structure of motivation (Mitina, 2004; Zamfir, 1983). The development of intrinsic motives implies the shift of extrinsic motive to the goal of professional activity (Leontyev, 2005). This, in its turn, depends largely on positive emotional experiences of teachers towards their profession.

In our opinion, the motivation to work is changing with an appearance of burn-out syndrome. That is why the aim of this research is to study the connection between peculiarities of professional burn-out and the formation of work motivation among teachers of urban and rural schools in Latvia.

2. Methodology of Research

2.1. General background of research

The interest to this study is rooted in a hypothesis that there is a relationship between teachers' work motivation and professional burn-out, also that there are differences and similarities between rural and urban schools. This can be shown in a paradigm manner, which is reflected in Figure 1.

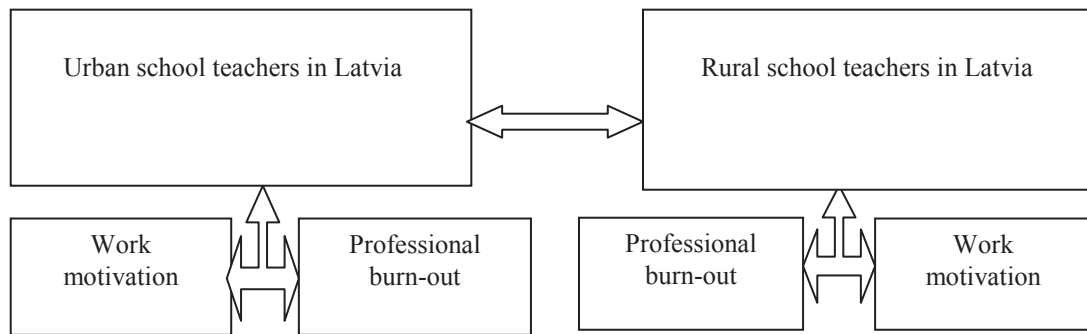


Figure 1. Research paradigm.

There is no big difference between teachers' work activities in both school types, although every school has its own specifics related to its location, i.e. amount of pupils and intensity of societal life. These specifics are reflected in working process and, in our opinion, can determine peculiarities of expressing motivation and degree of professional burn-out.

2.2. Participants

The research base is formed of 120 teachers (113 females and 7 males) representing Latvian urban secondary schools (UST) and 120 teachers (108 females and 12 males) representing rural secondary schools (RST). All participants have had less than 5 years of professional experience. This category of teachers in Latvia represents approximately 3% of all teachers working in day schools in Latvia.

2.3. Instruments

The participants were asked to fill out A.Rean's (2006) modification of C.Zamfir's (1983) Work Motivation Inventory (WMI) and N.Vodopyanova's (2003) modification of Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) (Maslach, Jackson & Leiter, 1996) to detect professional burn-out.

The MBI (22 items) consists of 3 scales: emotional exhaustion (9 items, maximum score – 54), depersonalisation (5 items, maximum score – 30) and reduced personal accomplishment (8 items, maximum score – 48). The 22 items of the MBI are evaluated according to 6-point scale, in which participants mark the frequency of their thoughts and feelings in relation to every statement: from 0 (never) to 6 (every day).

The WMI consists of the list of 7 motives, grouped in 3 motivational complexes – economic motive, career growth and social status motives form the complex of Extrinsic Positive Motivation; motives of relationships with administration and avoiding troubles form Extrinsic Negative Motivational complex; motives of work satisfaction and self-realisation form the complex of Intrinsic Motivation. Respondents evaluate personal significance of each motive, using 5-point scale: from 1 (very insignificant) to 5 (very significant).

2.4. Procedure

The practical stage of the research took place in 2010, covering all regions of Latvia – Kurzeme, Vidzeme, Latgale and Zemgale. All teachers voluntarily agreed on participating in this research, because they were assured of the principle of confidentiality. In order to avoid interfering with school working regime, the teachers were giving their answers at the end of their work day, because the majority of teachers work according to the individual schedule. Teachers were participating in this study in small groups or individually. After the survey the data were statistically processed.

3. Research results

The values for emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and reduced personal accomplishment have been examined. The comparison of professional burn-out scales is reflected in figure 2.

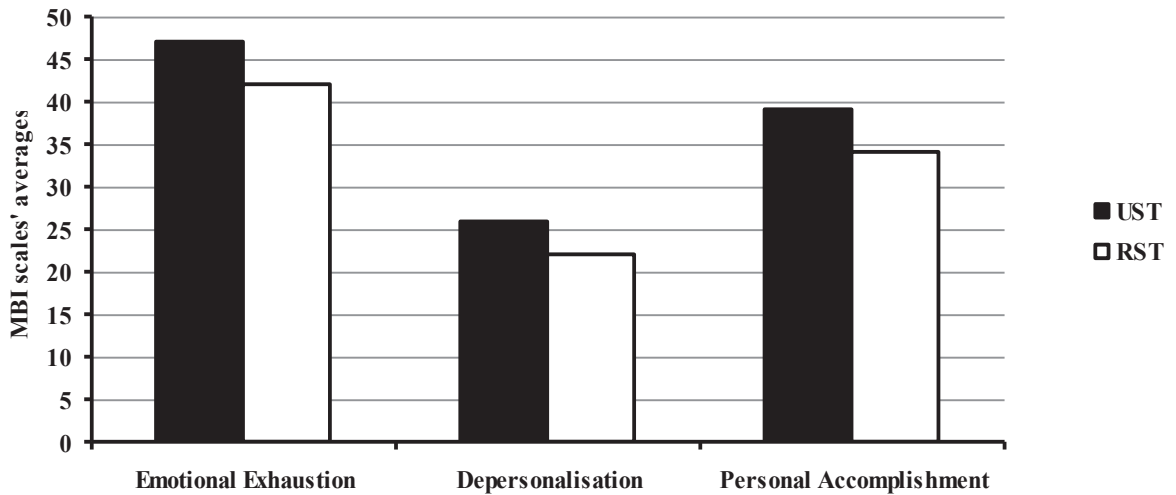


Figure 2. Comparison of professional burn-out scales among urban and rural school teachers

One of the professional burn-out scales – emotional exhaustion – is expressed at high level among urban and rural school teachers. The comparison of the emotional exhaustion indicators shows that it is expressed more among urban school teachers, although the difference is insignificant.

A similar result has been found for the scale of depersonalisation, i.e. the level of depersonalisation is high in both teachers’ groups, although it is higher among urban school teachers. The results indicate an approximately similar level of reduced personal accomplishment among both urban and rural secondary school teachers.

The analysis of work motivation test results, which are presented in figure 3, show dominant motives in the structure of work motivation for both urban and rural school teachers.

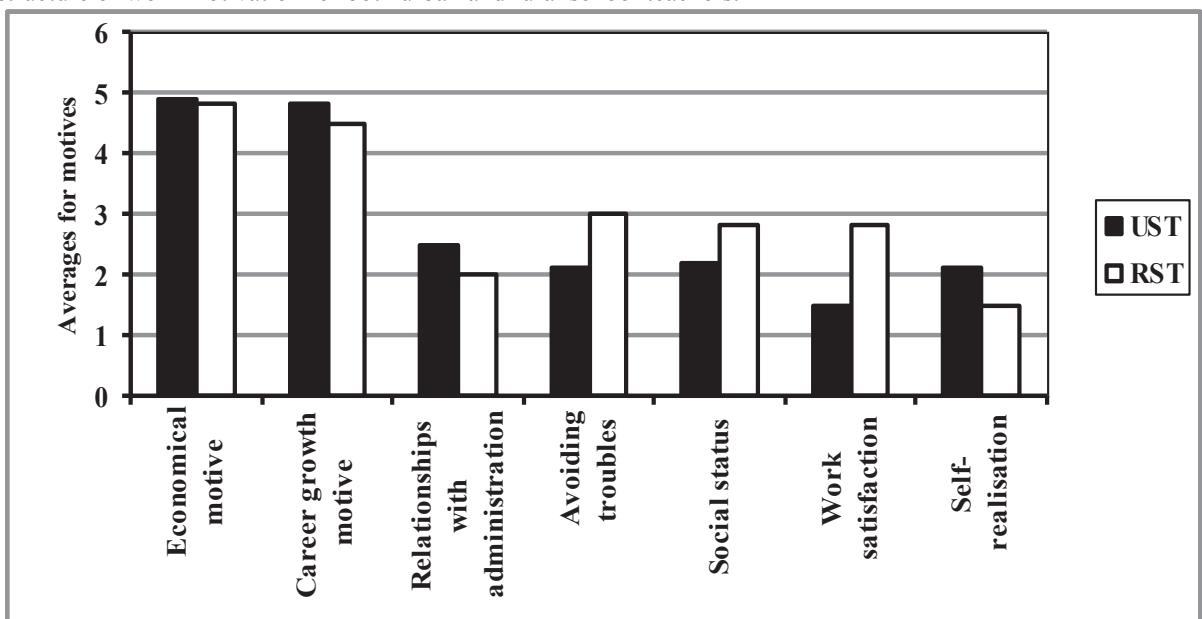


Figure 3. Professional work motives' rating distribution for urban and rural secondary school teachers.

One dominant motive – economic motive – stands out from 7 work motives for urban and rural school teachers.

Professional growth motive, which plays important role in teacher's work, occupies the second place in the motives' hierarchy. It should be noted that the evaluation of this motive's significance has similar tendency to the first motive: it is slightly higher among urban school teachers.

However, a different situation has been found with ranking the third place: "relationships with administration" occupies this place in the motivational structure of urban school teachers, while this motive is not significant for rural school teachers and it occupies the last (seventh) place. Rural school teachers have placed "avoiding troubles" to the third place. This indicates that aspiration to avoid troubles is greater among rural school teachers, while their colleagues in urban schools place this motive to the fifth line. Social status is fourth most significant motive for both urban and rural school teachers, although its value is higher among rural school teachers. Rural school teachers place work satisfaction motive also in the fourth position, while urban school teachers rank this motive as the least significant and place it at the end of the list. Self-realisation motive is insignificant for both groups of teachers: fifth place for urban and sixth – for rural school teachers.

Table 1 reflects indicators for three motivational complexes: Extrinsic Positive Motivation (EPM), Extrinsic Negative Motivation (ENM) and Intrinsic Motivation (IM).

Table 1. Indicators of EPM, ENM and IM among urban and rural secondary school teachers

	EPM	ENM	IM
UST	3.97	2.25	1.75
RST	4.03	2.55	2.15

The current research has discovered similar combination of motivational complexes for both urban and rural school teachers: $EPM > ENM > IM$. Differences appear only in the scale of their expression.

Zamfir (1983) assumes that the best combination of motivational complexes is $IM > EPM > ENM$ or $IM = EPM > ENM$, while the worst one is $ENM > EPM > IM$.

The variation of three motivational complexes suggests that urban and rural secondary school teachers have high value of extrinsic positive motivation and low value of intrinsic motivation, which in accordance with the construct of inventory indicates dissatisfaction of teachers with their profession (Rean, 2006).

The study implied correlation analysis in order to detect correlations between work motives and professional burn-out. The results of mathematical processing are reflected in table 2.

Table 2. Comparison of detected correlations for urban and rural school teachers

		Economical motive	Career growth motive	Relationships with administration motive	Avoiding troubles motive	Social status motive	Work satisfaction motive	Self-realisation motive
Emotional exhaustion	UST	.51*	-.20	.10	-.13	-.45*	.46*	.16
	RST	.35*	.44*	-.14	.04	.01	-.13	.10
Depersonalisation	UST	-.03	.35*	-.28	-.02	-.39*	.33*	.13
	RST	-.04	.43*	-.15	-.04	.02	.10	.10
Reduced personal accomplishment	UST	.15	.34*	.51*	-.10	.10	-.17	.20
	RST	.05	.51*	-.03	-.13	.03	-.02	.03

* $p < .05$

Significant positive correlation is detected between economic motive and emotional exhaustion among both urban and rural school teachers.

There is a significant positive correlation between career growth motive and all professional burn-out scales among rural school teachers. The results also show that there is a positive correlation between career growth motive, depersonalisation and reduced personal accomplishment among urban school teachers. In contrast, emotional exhaustion and career growth do not correlate for urban teachers' group, although there is a significant positive correlation between reduced personal accomplishment and relationships with administration.

Social status motive has negative correlation with emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation scale only for urban school teachers. This indicates certain type of attitude towards their professional responsibilities.

By contrast, work content motive positively and significantly correlates with emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation level among urban school teachers, which has not been found among rural school teachers.

Both teacher groups have not shown any significant correlation between self-realisation motive and all professional burn-out scales.

4. Discussion

The analysis of professional burn-out syndrome expressions implied focusing on teachers' emotional overload, exhaustion of emotional resources, appearance of negative attitude towards other people and self-dissatisfaction from the viewpoint of professional competence.

It is known that high level of burn-out leads to passivity, decrease of professional and personal self-evaluation and competition as a way to survive in a society. Unfortunately, this may lead to neurosis (Formanyuk, 1994). A sign of emotional instability may also express itself in pedagogical practice, determined by the motives of avoiding blame (Rean, 2006).

The current study unfolds positive significant correlation between emotional exhaustion and economic motive among urban and rural secondary school teachers. It is acknowledged that nowadays economic motive prevails over all other motives (Forands, 2007). Despite the fact that salary in Zamfir's Inventory is an indicator of

extrinsic positive motivation, in our case results show that nowadays economic motive outweighs any other high value and has acquired negative connotation.

The analysis of depersonalisation tendencies shows that there is a formation of indifferent attitude and interpersonal contacts become more formal. There is a probability of the formation of latent negative attitudes (Maslach, 1993). Teachers, when solving problematic professional situations, experience decreasing reaction, changing adaptive mechanisms and appearance of stress-instability. This may lead to aggression, competition and incontinence of teachers (Vodopyanova, 2009). Particularly distinctive situation may rise in urban schools, because reduced personal accomplishment significantly correlates with the motive of relationships with administration. Most likely teachers are experiencing more control from the side of administration. Small rural school teachers feel themselves more comfortable in unurbanised environment.

The results of reduced personal accomplishment level are not optimistic. They indicate an approximately similar level for both teachers' groups, although urban teachers have a slightly higher rate, which underlines unwillingness of teachers to constructively solve conflicts and problem situations with colleagues and pupils, withdrawal of liability and distancing themselves from their duties in relation to the others.

In our study high levels of depersonalisation and reduced personal accomplishment are significantly correlated with the motive of career growth among urban and rural school teachers. We believe that teachers do not see prospects for their vertical and horizontal career. Probably, teachers in both groups perceive career growth as a threat, i.e. they fear that they will not achieve success in their work, therefore they focus on negative emotional feelings (Folkman & Lazarus, 1985).

It is known that professional growth implies the necessity to satisfy the need of self-actualisation (Maslow, 2003). Successful cooperation and collegial relations are basis for achieving good results (Kokurina, 1990), especially when employees possess high growth need strength (Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 2007). In contrast, our study shows that continuing dissatisfaction with "higher" need may lead to self-devaluation as a professional and inability to value professionalism of their own colleagues (Borisova, 2005). Indirectly this situation is confirmed by low value of social status motive. This may indicate the loss of popularity of teacher profession in Latvian society. Teachers do not feel that their profession has any social prestige in the society.

Similar motivational complex of teacher personality both in urban and rural schools – EPM > ENM > IM and the appearance of professional burn-out syndrome, according to our views, indirectly confirm similar attitude of teachers to processes that take place in the society, i.e. decreasing number of teachers in the last two years as a result of cutting state budget form uncertainty about the future. In its turn, awareness of this uncertainty contributes to the appearance of anxiety feelings, which leads to inability to adaptively react in social situations (Lazarus, 1991). In addition, teacher profession is widely criticised by the society for the decreasing level of the quality of education. This negative feature, in our opinion, influences the quality of execution of professional duties.

Thus, one could argue that there is a tendency to transfer responsibility for what is happening and for their own lives to external factors (Byrne, 1994). In addition, a part of teachers could accept passive life position; therefore they demonstrate high professional burn-out results (Holt et al., 1987).

In general, it must be noted that if in the upcoming decade the schools in Latvia do not experience the inflow of young specialists, the society does not change its attitude to teacher profession status and if teachers do not change their attitude to their own social status, the quality of school education may decrease dramatically. Teacher profession does not have a highly-paid status, therefore the inflow of prospective specialists into the system of education takes place slowly. This problem is common for today's Latvia in general, and especially relevant for the rural schools.

5. Conclusion

Urban and rural school teachers in Latvia with professional experience of less than five years demonstrate high level of emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and reduced personal accomplishment. High reduction level is evidence that teachers are experiencing difficulties in their professional self-realisation.

Extrinsic motives – economic and career growth opportunities – dominate the hierarchy of motivation to work among urban and rural secondary school teachers. Intrinsic positive motives occupy low positions in motivational hierarchy, which means that stimulation of professional fulfilment in one's chosen profession is suppressed.

The motive of work satisfaction, need of social status and self-realisation occupy low hierarchic positions in the structure of work motivation among urban secondary school teachers. Rural secondary school teachers reserve low position to the motive of self-realisation.

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